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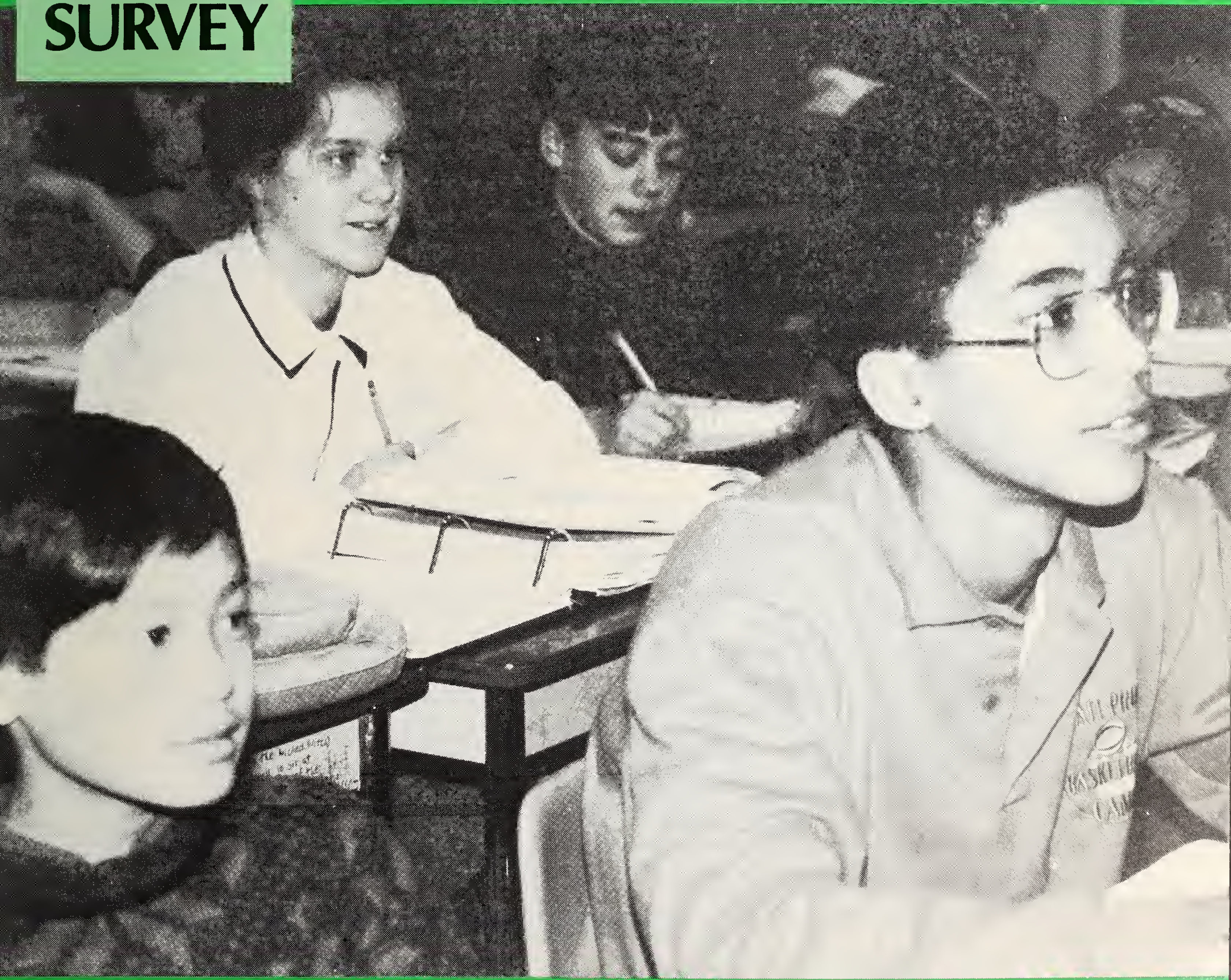

Public Attitudes Towards Education in Ontario ~ 1988

A PUBLICATION OF THE ONTARIO INSTITUTE FOR STUDIES IN EDUCATION

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ORBIT 89

The Seventh OISE Survey: Public Attitudes Towards Education in Ontario—1988

D. W. Livingstone, D. J. Hart, and L. E. Davie

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Contributions: The editors of *Orbit* would be glad to receive from readers articles about education practice, criticisms of past issues of *Orbit*, letters, and suggestions for future issues.

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SEVENTH
OISE
SURVEY

Public Attitudes Towards Education in Ontario ~ 1988

D. W. Livingstone, D. J. Hart, and L. E. Davie, The Ontario Institute for Studies in Education

The 1988 OISE Survey of Educational Issues is the seventh in a series which began in 1978.[1] It remains the only regularly administered public survey of public attitudes toward educational policy options in Canada.[2] This survey provides profiles of general public and specific group attitudes regarding currently proposed educational reforms. It also documents trends in public support for education. Though readers of this report should be aware of the various limitations inherent in surveys of public concerns, they should also take note that careful opinion surveys are a most reliable means for getting representative readings of public sentiment, with great potential to improve awareness of attitudes to important social and political issues.[3]

Current events and media coverage are likely to have some effects on public sentiments. At the beginning of the 1988–89 school year, the hearings of the Select Committee on Education were attracting considerable attention. This legislative committee heard a wide variety of presentations on future directions for the Ontario school system, most of which focussed on issues of student streaming and assessment policies, as well as curriculum priorities. The problem of illiteracy was also being widely discussed, as was the question of the adequacy of government funding for public education. This selective listing is merely intended to record something of the particular context of our 1988 survey.

Table 1: "How satisfied are you with the current situation in Ontario elementary and high schools with respect to the school system in general?"

	Satisfied %	Dissatisfied %	Neither/ Not stated %	N
1979	50	30	20	1,084
1980	51	29	20	1,108
1982	55	24	21	1,050
1986	42	33	25	1,042
1988	36	37	28	1,011

The Survey Design

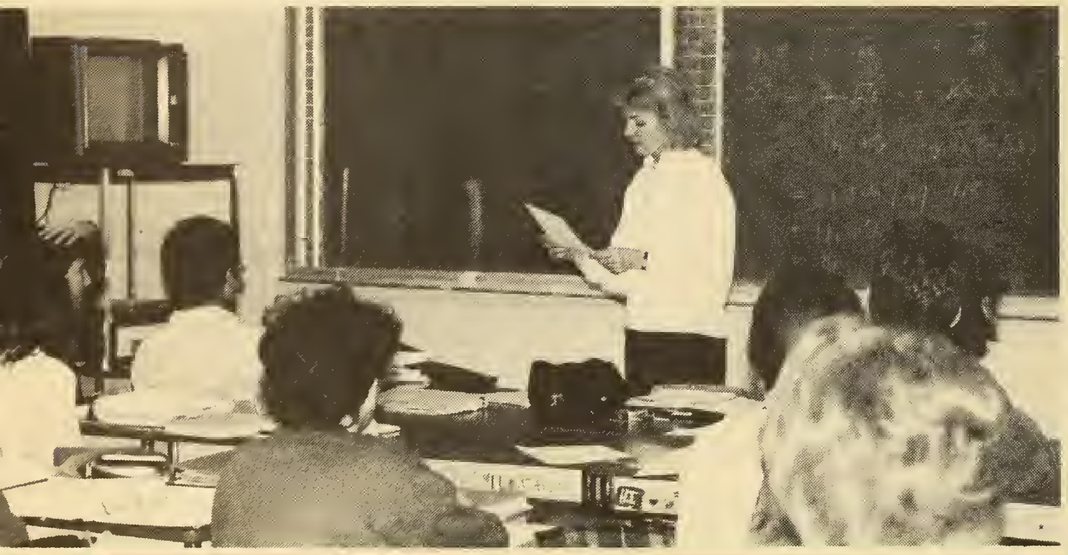
The 1988 OISE survey involved a representative sample of 1,011 adults, 18 years of age and over, who were interviewed in their homes across Ontario between September 12 and 24 by the Canadian Gallup polling agency. A special sample of corporate executives (123 respondents) also replied to a mailed questionnaire during approximately the same period. A fuller description of the sampling procedures and guidelines for interpreting statistical differences appears in the Appendix. Question wordings are presented in most tables; the questionnaire is available from the authors on request.

This report is organized according to the major topics covered by the questionnaire, namely: general evaluations of the schools; funding preferences; extension of education services; curriculum priorities; high school organization (including subsections on student streaming, student assessment, and dropouts); educational inequalities; and adult education.

In reporting our 1988 findings, we refer whenever possible to comparable items from other surveys as well as from the previous OISE surveys. Responses to each question have been analyzed in relation to various general background variables. These factors include: age, sex, contact with the schools, educational attainment, religion, mother tongue, ethnicity, family income, occupational class, geographical region, and size of community. Only statistically significant differences on these factors are reported here. ☐

We are grateful to the wide variety of Ontario interest group representatives and individual citizens who have made suggestions to us over the past two years about relevant educational issues for the survey. The other members of our project staff, Sandra Awang, Bob Bowd, Linda Carty, Nigel Grant, Sylvia Novac, and especially Jill Given-King, all provided valuable research assistance.

We again invite comments on the current report and suggestions for the 1990 survey from all interested readers.



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SEVENTH OISE SURVEY

General Evaluations of Schools: Public Satisfaction and Perceptions of Changing Quality

The OISE survey series, in common with most polls of educational opinion, has included questions asking for summary evaluations of the school system. In most surveys, including the current one, we have asked respondents how "satisfied" they are with the "school system in general." In selected years — 1979, 1984, and the current year — the survey has included a question on whether the "quality" of education in Ontario high schools has "improved" or "deteriorated."

The results of summary evaluation questions, which include giving the school system a "grade" (see Flower, 1984), are probably the most widely publicized of educational poll results. They are also among the most distrusted among educational practitioners and authorities. This is likely because the questions have virtually no content in themselves and commentators and readers are free to impose a broad range of interpretations on results. In this situation, it is not surprising that the results do not readily yield to explanations provided by the data collected in the poll. Interpretations, even by researchers themselves, are commonly "imported" from outside the survey data; that is, they are based on knowledge and opinions derived elsewhere. In the absence of compelling, empirically demonstrated links between ratings or perceptions and specific educational policies or practices, our view is that summary measures of public opinion are best seen as crude barometers of either the extent of general good will toward school authorities or, conversely, the extent of disenchantment which is available as a potential resource to critics of the schools.

Public Satisfaction

The OISE survey results for 1988 confirm the pattern of the decade — that of an almost continuous decline in satisfaction with the situation in Ontario elementary and secondary schools (see Table 1). In 1979, 50 percent of respondents to the OISE survey pronounced themselves satisfied with the schools; only 30 percent were dissatisfied. The decline in satisfaction from 1986 was small — 6 percentage points — but had a 95 percent probability of being real rather than due to sampling error. In 1988, opinion was almost balanced — 36 percent satisfied, 37 percent dissatisfied. Results of Canadian Gallup Poll surveys in the 1970s suggest that this pattern represents a second consecutive decade of decline in satisfaction with the school situation (see Livingstone & Hart, 1980, p. 6). Readers should note that the Gallup Poll question differs from the question used in the OISE surveys; hence only trends, not absolute levels of satisfaction, can be compared.

As in 1986, satisfaction with the schools does not vary much among social groups. Age differences persist, though they are slightly narrower than in the early years of the decade; 42 percent of respondents aged 18 to 24 reported being satisfied with the school system compared to 26 percent of those 65 or older. Those who did not have children in the school system and did not attend classes themselves were less likely to be satisfied with the schools than those who had children attending elementary school only (31 versus 45 percent). However, differences between respondents in these two categories have narrowed substantially from earlier years; in 1980 and 1982, the proportions satisfied with the schools differed by over 20 percentage points (42 versus 64 percent in 1980, 45 versus 71 percent in 1982). This is the strongest signal of what appears to be generally narrowing differences in the subjective evaluations of those with and without children in the school system, mainly due to more rapidly declining levels of satisfaction among parents. Finally, among occupational classes, corporate executives continue to be least likely (19 percent versus near 40 percent for most other classes) to report satisfaction with the school situation.

One qualification should be introduced here regarding satisfaction levels reported by parents. U.S. Gallup polls have revealed that parents award higher grades to the schools their children attend than to schools in their community or to the nation's schools (see Gallup, 1988, p. 36). There is evidence of the same pattern in one recent Ontario poll (*Toronto Star*, 1987, p. 3). Parents were asked how satisfied they were with "your child/children's school overall." The *Star's* scale differed from ours in that respondents selected from the options "very satisfied," "somewhat satisfied," "a little satisfied," and "not satisfied at all." It does not appear that this scale would elicit more positive evaluations than our own which runs from "very satisfied" to "very dissatisifed." It is then striking that over 80 percent of parents indicated they were at least somewhat satisfied with their children's school (30 percent were very satisfied) — almost double the figure for satisfaction with the school situation in general.

In the 1988 OISE survey, there is little

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relationship between respondents' satisfaction levels and their views on major specific educational issues — for example, separate school full funding and the transfer of public schools to separate boards, use of province-wide tests, streaming, or preferences regarding educational spending. There is, however, a relatively strong relationship between satisfaction levels and perceptions of the changing quality of high school education while there is a weaker relationship between satisfaction levels and perceptions of the changing competence of teachers and a still weaker association with performance ratings regarding how well students are learning to read/write, to do math, and to acquire skills/ knowledge in some other areas. In other words, satisfaction level is essentially associated with other evaluation measures, and the more specific the measure, the weaker the relationship.

Changes in the Quality of High School Education

While general satisfaction with the schools has declined over the 1980s, a continuation of a pattern extending from the previous decade, public perceptions of changes in the quality of high school education appear to have remained stable (see Table 2). OISE survey results for 1984 and 1988 on this question are virtually identical. Slightly over a quarter of respondents in each year thought quality had improved over the past ten years; slightly over a third saw deterioration. The apparent decline between 1979 and 1988 in the proportion who think quality has improved in fact represents a difference just outside the boundaries of sampling error. Longer time series data available from Canadian Gallup Poll surveys (again using different wording from the OISE surveys such that only trends can be compared) suggest that this pattern represents the stabilization of opinion after a period of decline (for elementary and high school education combined) dating from before the seventies (see Livingstone & Hart, 1980, pp. 8–9; Livingstone, Hart & Davie, 1985, pp. 5–6; Livingstone & Hart, 1987, pp. 10–11 for summaries of prior poll results on questions of quality).

In past survey reports, we have stressed that while "satisfaction" and "quality" questions represent summary measures of educational opinion, they differ in what is asked for. On the one hand, the satisfaction question involves a subjective evaluation involving one's standards or expectations. On the other hand, the quality question asks for an assessment of "objective" change from particular base points. There is as well the difference in institutional focus in the OISE surveys, given that the satisfaction question encompasses both elementary and high school education. However, the difference in trends for satisfaction and quality measures appears to represent a drawing together of satisfaction ratings and perceptions of changing quality in high school education.

Table 2: "Overall, would you say the quality of education received by students in Ontario high schools over the last ten years has...?"

	Improved %	Remained the same %	Deteriorated %	Don't know/ Not stated %	N
1976*	31	16	46	8	1,000
1979	32	16	42	10	1,084
1984	28	17	37	18	1,046
1988	27	22	39	12	1,011

*Source: Ontario Ministry of Colleges and Universities and Ontario Ministry of Education, Roles and Responsibilities of the Secondary and Postsecondary Institutions, Secondary/Post-Secondary Interface Study Project 1 (Toronto: Canadian Facts, 1976), p. 139; 1979-1988 figures are from the OISE survey series.

Between 1979 and 1988, satisfaction with the school system in general and perceptions of improvement in the quality of high school education — and similarly, dissatisfaction and perceptions of deterioration — have become more closely linked. In 1979, 59 percent of those who thought the quality of high school education had remained the same pronounced themselves satisfied with the situation of the school system in general. In 1988, the figure is 39 percent. Similarly, in 1979, only among those who thought that the quality of high school education had greatly deteriorated were a majority (60 percent) dissatisfied with the school system in general, compared to 36 percent of those who saw some deterioration. In 1988, 57 percent of those who perceived some deterioration and 79 percent who thought high school education had greatly deteriorated reported such dissatisfaction.

In other words, satisfaction levels have continued to decline while perceptions of change in the quality of high school education have remained

Table 3: "Overall would you say that over the last ten years, the competence of teachers has ..."

	Improved %	Remained the same %	Deteriorated %	Don't know/ Not stated %	N
Elementary school teachers	31	28	25	17	1,011
High school teachers	24	30	27	18	1,011

roughly constant; satisfaction has increasingly been linked to perceptions of improvement in quality rather than maintenance of the status quo, while dissatisfaction has spread among those seeing deterioration. Thus, the consolation educational practitioners and authorities might draw from the finding that a majority in 1988 (as well as 1979) do not perceive that quality has declined (that is, has improved or remained the same) will be reduced by the knowledge that public satisfaction is increasingly tied to perceptions of improved quality.

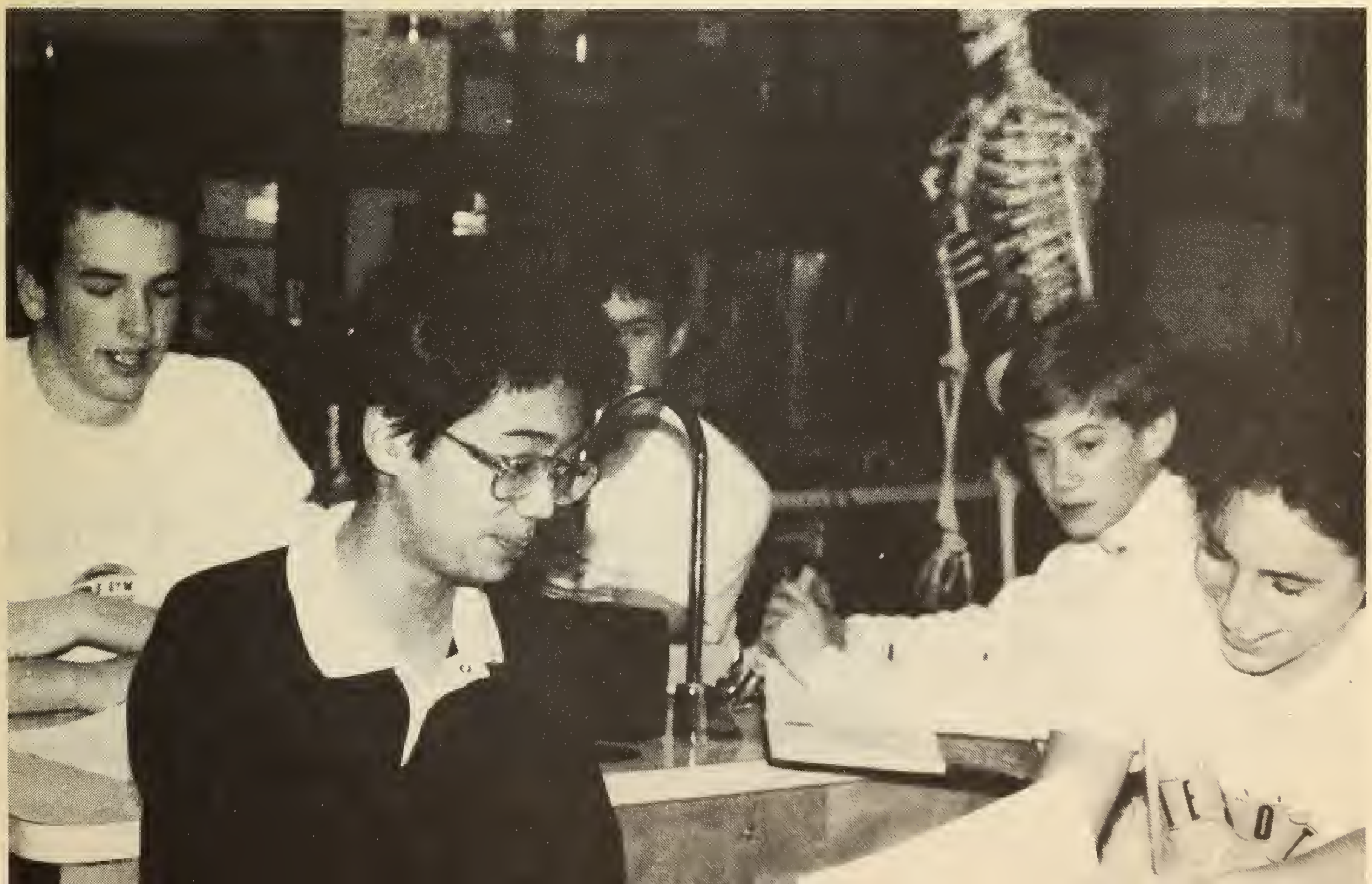
As in the case of responses to the question on satisfaction, perceptions of changes in the quality of high school education differ little among social groups defined by our background questions. A relatively strong relationship, however, appears for age groups. Forty-one percent of those 18 to 24 think that quality has improved, compared to 15 percent of those 65 and older. Similar age differences appeared in 1979 and 1984.

Beyond the relationship between satisfaction level noted above, perceptions of changes in the quality of high school education are highly correlated with perceptions of changes in the competence both of elementary and high school teachers, and less strongly with performance ratings for reading/writing, math skills, and some other objectives. As in the case of satisfaction level, perceptions of changing quality bear little or no relationship to views on major specific educational issues covered by the survey.

Changes in the Competence of Elementary and High School Teachers

In addition to the question on changes in the quality of high school education, respondents to the 1988 OISE survey were asked about changes in the competence of elementary and high school teachers over the past ten years. Results are broadly similar for the elementary and high school levels (see Table 3). Approximately a quarter of respondents think teachers' competence has deteriorated, about 30 percent see no change, while 31 percent in the case of elementary teachers and 24 percent for high school teachers see improvement. While high school teachers fare somewhat less well than elementary school teachers, fewer respondents see deterioration in the competence of high school teachers than perceive decline in the quality of high school education overall.

Those with children in elementary school only are somewhat more likely to think that the competence of elementary level teachers has improved over the past ten years than respondents having no formal contact with the school system (41 versus 26 percent). It might be noted, finally, that the 1987 poll cited earlier found that 77 percent of parents were at least somewhat satisfied with respect to teachers (*Toronto Star*, 1987, p. 20). ☐



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SEVENTH
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Educational Funding Preferences

Size of Educational Expenditures

The survey has consistently tried to assess Ontarians' priorities for funding public education, both generally in relation to other areas of government spending and for specific types of education. Relevant findings on the desired size of government spending for all purposes, for education generally, and for specific types of education are summarized in Table 4.

One-third of the current respondents would like to see government spending increase in general, while nearly half want it to keep up with inflation and less than one-fifth would prefer decreased general spending. Support for increased general spending appears to have grown since 1986.

Support for educational spending has continued to be much stronger than support for government spending in general. Over 60 percent now support increased spending for education in general, about a third want it to keep up with inflation, and only 5 percent want decreased educational funding. Support for increased educational funding has clearly grown throughout the 1980s, with significant gain continuing over the past two years. These findings are consistent with the patterns of results on government funding preferences emerging from other, occasional surveys over the past several years (e.g., Canadian Gallup Poll, 1986, Decima, 1985; Goldfarb, 1985; and Reid, 1986.)

Table 4: "What would you like to see happen to government spending for the following purposes?"

	Increase %	Keep up with inflation[1] %	Decrease %	Not stated %	N
Total spending for all purposes					
1984	26	42	29	3	1,046
1986	25	40	28	6	1,042
1988	38	45	15	3	1,011
For all levels of education					
1979	35	43	17	5	1,084
1980	36	50	10	4	1,108
1982	35	53	11	2	1,050
1984	46	40	11	3	1,042
1986	52	34	11	3	1,042
1988	61	32	5	1	1,011
For elementary and high schools					
1975[2]	20	51	18	10	1,294
1980	38	48	10	4	1,108
1982	37	50	11	3	1,050
1984	45	42	10	3	1,046
1986	50	36	9	5	1,042
1988	61	31	5	3	1,011
For community colleges					
1975[2,3]	25	45	15	14	1,294
1980	37	47	10	6	1,108
1982	38	48	11	4	1,050
1984	48	38	10	4	1,046
1986	48	35	10	7	1,042
1988	55	35	6	4	1,011
For universities					
1975[2,3]	25	45	15	14	1,294
1980	31	49	12	8	1,108
1982	34	49	14	4	1,050
1984	44	41	11	4	1,046
1986	49	34	10	7	1,042
1988	57	33	6	4	1,011
For job retraining					
1984	70	19	7	3	1,046
1986	73	16	8	3	1,042
1988	68	24	6	3	1,011
For adult training in reading and writing					
1986	71	19	6	4	1,042
1988	70	22	5	3	1,011

1. In 1979, the middle option read "Maintain at about the same level"; in later surveys, this was replaced by "Just keep up with inflation."

2. Source: D. Auld, "Public Sector Awareness and Preferences in Ontario," Canadian Tax Journal 27(2), (March-April 1979), p. 178.

3. Community colleges and universities combined.

The general trend of growing public support for increased educational spending is confirmed by our findings regarding spending preferences for specific types of education. Our 1988 findings for different levels of the formal educational system (elementary and high schools, community colleges, and universities) are very similar to those for education in general; that is, definite majorities now favour increased spending at each level, with most of the remaining respondents wanting spending to keep up with inflation and small minorities wanting decreased spending (see Reid, 1986). At all levels, support for increased funding has grown since the early 1980s. Public support for increased funding of adult education, in the form of either job retraining or adult

Table 5: Preferred Size of Total Educational Expenditure by Background

	Increase %	Keep up with inflation %	Decrease %	Not stated %	N
All respondents	61	32	5	2	1.011
Age					
18-24	75	20	4	2	147
25-34	74	22	2	2	243
35-44	71	25	4	0	196
45-54	55	38	7	1	139
55-64	43	46	10	1	148
65 +	35	54	9	2	129
Contact with schools					
Self or spouse attending	81	15	0	3	35
Child at elementary only	75	22	2	1	209
Children at elementary and high school	68	29	3	0	60
Child at high school only	62	34	2	2	52
Child at postsecondary only	61	34		4	42
Children at postsecondary and other level	61	39	0	0	27
No formal contact	55	36	7	2	586
Education					
Elementary	28	45	15	2	131
High school incomplete	54	40	4	2	197
High school complete	63	33	4	1	250
Non-university post-secondary	67	27	4	1	211
University	74	22	3	1	221
Occupational class					
Corporate executives	45	41	9	6	123
Small employers	63	29	5	3	35
Self-employed	51	40	9	0	31
Managers	78	20	2	0	47
Professional employees	75	22	2	0	76
Supervisors	70	25	5	0	154
Self-employed	51	40	9	0	31
Non-industrial workers	63	31	3	2	121
Industrial workers	65	30	3	2	106
Unemployed	51	49	0	0	21
Homemakers	56	35	6	4	178
Retired	38	49	11	2	118
Students	76	22	2	0	61

Table 6: "Would you or would you not be willing to pay more taxes in support of education?"

	Yes %	No %	Don't Know/ Not stated %	N
All respondents				
1984[1]	45	47	8	753
1988	48	48	4	1,011
Age				
18-24	52	36	13	147
25-34	61	37	2	243
35-44	55	42	4	196
45-54	49	49	2	139
55-64	28	70	2	147
65 +	32	66	2	129
Contact with schools				
Self or spouse attending	65	23	12	35
Child at elementary only	59	39	3	209
Children at elementary and high school	45	48	8	60
Child at high school only	50	50	0	52
Child at postsecondary only	49	46	5	42
Children at postsecondary and other level	57	43	0	27
No formal contact	43	54	4	586
Education				
Elementary	22	77	2	131
High school incomplete	41	54	5	197
High school complete	49	48	3	250
Non-university post-secondary	49	46	5	211
University	67	28	5	221
Family income				
Under $10,000	45	46	9	56
$10,000 to $14,999	41	57	2	53
$15.000 to $19,000	42	51	7	60
$20,000 to $29.999	40	54	6	135
$30,000 to $39.999	45	51	4	156
$40.000 to $59.999	60	40	1	185
$60.000 and over	66	33	1	185

[1] From the 1984 CEA Poll of Canadian opinion on education, see George Flower, Speaking Out, Canadian Educational Association: Toronto, 1984.

training in reading and writing, remains somewhat stronger than support for funding the formal school system, continuing at around the 70 percent level (see Goldfarb, 1985).

The major social group differences in support for educational funding in Ontario are suggested by Table 5, which summarizes the significant differences in responses to spending "for all levels of education." Strong majorities in age groups under 45 as well as a small majority of those aged 45 to 54 want increased educational spending, while only minorities of those over 55 do so. In terms of contact with schools, those attending school themselves or with children at elementary school tend to be most supportive while those with no formal contact tend to be least supportive. But even among those with no formal contact there is now majority support for increased funding. Those with higher formal educational attainments are more supportive of increased funding, but only respondents with elementary schooling alone offer less than majority support for increased funding — one-quarter as opposed to three-quarters of the university educated. Among occupational classes, corporate executives and the retired are now the only groups to offer minority support for increased funding, while students, managers, and professionals are the most supportive. Similar differences have been found in prior OISE surveys.

Education Taxes

People's willingness to pay higher taxes for education has often been regarded as one of the most basic indicators of the strength of public support for educational spending. In the current survey, we have replicated a relevant question asked in the 1984 Canadian Education Association poll (Flower, 1984). As Table 6 indicates, the Ontario public is now equally divided on whether or not to pay more taxes in support of education. There may have been a marginal shift in favour of paying higher education taxes over the past four years. Comparable U.S. surveys suggest similar marginal gains in willingness to pay more taxes for education (Gallup & Elam, 1988). This pattern contrasts with the much more substantial gains in support for spending on education. However, our further analysis has found a very strong positive association between willingness to pay higher taxes and support for increased educational spending. It is also clear from our own and other studies (e.g., Goldfarb, 1985; Welch, 1985) that many of those who oppose paying higher taxes for education also support the re-allocation of some other existing government revenues to increase educational spending.

As Table 6 further indicates, willingness to pay higher taxes for education is significantly related to several social background factors. The majority of those under 45 express willingness, while less than one-third of those over age 55 do so. (Opposition is strongest among the retired.) Those attending school themselves or with children in elementary schools are most likely to be willing to pay higher taxes, while the majority of those without any formal contact with schools are opposed. Those who have the highest formal education strongly favour paying higher taxes for education, while those with the least education strongly oppose doing so. Among income groups, only those with family incomes over $40,000 express definite willingness to pay more taxes in support of education.

Table 7: "Would you favour or oppose an increase in provincial taxes and a reduction in property taxes, in order that the provincial government pay a greater share of school expenses?"

	Favour %	Oppose %	Don't know/ Doesn't matter %	N
1979[1]	34	43	22	1,080
1988	52	30	19	1,011
Age				
18-24	52	30	19	147
25-34	59	25	16	243
35-44	60	23	7	196
45-54	53	27	21	139
55-64	37	40	22	147
65 +	39	39	22	129
Education				
Elementary	40	36	24	131
High school incomplete	49	30	21	197
High school complete	55	28	17	250
Non-university postsecondary	48	31	21	211
University	59	27	14	221
Would pay more taxes for education				
Yes	69	15	16	484
No	36	45	19	488

1. Ontario Ministry of Education, Attitudes of the Public Toward Schools in Ontario, Toronto; MOE, 1979.

Table 8: "The Ontario government has recently begun to provide provincial funding to the Roman Catholic school system through the end of high school rather than to grade 10 as had been the case for several decades. What schools do you think should be given government funding, provided they meet province-wide standards?*

	Public Only %	Public plus Catholic to Grade 10 %	Public and Full Catholic %	Public, Catholic and all Religions %	Catholic and all Private %	Don't Know %	N
All respondents							
1984	21	12	39	9	17	2	1,046
1986	28	9	31	7	23	2	1,042
1988	24	9	32	7	21	8	1,011
Religion							
Protestant	31	11	30	5	16	7	511
Catholic	6	6	43	9	29	7	324
Jewish	30	4	16	0	36	14	24
Other	42	12	17	7	8	14	25
No religion	38	8	21	8	16	9	127
Mother tongue							
English	27	10	32	6	19	7	763
French	4	5	38	17	26	9	72
Other	20	6	32	8	25	10	176
Ethnic group							
British	32	9	32	6	16	6	553
French	7	9	38	14	20	12	86
Other European	15	9	36	5	27	8	270
Non-European	29	7	16	9	28	11	88

*Note: In 1984 and 1966, the question was phrased "The Ontario government intends to provide..."

Funding Sources

Over the past generation in Ontario there has been a great deal of debate over appropriate revenue sources for funding public education. One of the most controversial issues has been the role of local property taxes versus provincially raised taxes. We have repeated a question used in an earlier Ontario Ministry of Education survey (1979) about support for increasing provincial taxes and reducing property taxes to pay school expenses.

As Table 7 shows, a small majority of respondents now favour increasing the share of provincial taxes and reducing property taxes, while less than one-third oppose increasing the provincial share, and about one-fifth express uncertainty on the matter. Support for increased reliance on provincial taxes appears to have grown substantially since 1979 — although even at that time our own survey detected strong plurality opposition to further *increasing* the share of property taxes (Livingstone & Hart, 1980).

As Table 7 further shows, the majority of those under 55 years of age favour an increased provincial share in school expenses, while those over 55 are more divided. The university educated are generally most likely to favour an increased provincial share while those with only elementary education are almost equally divided. (In addition, among occupational classes, distinct minorities of corporate executives, the self-employed, and the retired favour an increased provincial share.) This table also indicates that those who are prepared to pay more personal taxes for education are very likely to favour an increase in the provincial tax share, whereas those who are not prepared to pay higher personal taxes are more likely to oppose such a change.

Funding Catholic and Private Schools

Since the extension of provincial funding of Catholic schools from grade 10 to the end of high school was initiated in 1984, the matter of which types of schools should be given government money has been prominent in public debates about educational funding policy. The general issue of extended funding is complex and remains potentially volatile. Survey responses on this issue have been particularly sensitive to different question wording (e.g. Decima, 1986; Environics, 1986, 1988; Goldfarb, 1985). In the past three OISE surveys, we have asked respondents to express their preferences on the full range of government funding alternatives:

1. public schools only
2. public schools to the end of high school and Roman Catholic schools to grade 10
3. public and Roman Catholic schools to the end of high school
4. public and Roman Catholic schools as well as independent (that is, private) religious schools
5. all public, Roman Catholic, and all

Table 9: "Do you support or oppose the transfer of the buildings of public schools with declining enrollments to the Roman Catholic school system with growing enrollments?"

	Support %	Oppose %	Neither/ Not stated %	N
All respondents	46	25	29	1,011
Religion				
Protestant	40	30	30	511
Catholic	64	11	26	324
Jewish	28	26	46	24
Other	15	43	42	25
No religion	32	36	31	127
Mother tongue				
English	44	27	29	763
French	60	7	33	72
Other	47	23	30	176
Ethnic group				
British	45	28	27	553
French	45	16	34	86
Other European	51	21	28	270
Non-European	28	27	45	88
Which schools should be given government funding:				
Public only	30	51	19	244
Public, Catholic to Gr. 10	39	30	31	87
Public and full Catholic	60	14	26	328
Public and all religious	51	14	16	68
Public and all independent	55	20	25	205

types of independent (that is, private) schools

The results are summarized in Table 8. About one-third of Ontarians would now like to see government funding for formal education restricted either to the public schools exclusively or to the public schools plus the Catholic schools to grade 10; about at third support the extension of full funding to Catholic high schools but not to independent schools; of the remaining third, most support the extension of funding to all types of schools. Comparison with our prior surveys suggests that these proportions may have remained fairly stable throughout the post-1984 public controversy; the present survey is also consistent with most prior polling studies in finding definite majority support for options involving the full funding of Catholic high schools.

As may also be seen from Table 8, the main social divisions on the general issues of extended funding are found on closely related aspects of religious affiliation, ethnicity, and mother tongue. Very small minorities of Catholic and francophone respondents support anything less than full funding for Catholic schools; those of French and other non-British European ethnic origins are similarly stronger supporters of full Catholic school funding than British or non-European groups. It should be noted that, as in our prior surveys, a small majority of those of Protestant religious affiliation express support for the extension of full funding to Catholic schools either alone or in combination with funding for independent schools. Indeed, the only social groupings in which we have detected less than majority support for full Catholic funding are those with non-Judaeo-Christian affiliations or no religious affiliation, as well as the occupational class of corporate executives.

School Transfers

The extension of full funding to Catholic schools has occurred in a period when the public system has continued to experience declining enrolments. Consequently, there have been various proposals for the sharing or transfer of existing educational facilities between the public and Catholic systems. Surveys over the past few years have consistently found strong majority support for sharing existing facilities (Decima, 1985; Environics, 1988). Transfers of public schools to the Catholic system are potentially more contentious. Table 9 presents our findings on this question.

Nearly half of the current respondents support the transfer of public school buildings with declining enrolments to the Catholic system. One-quarter oppose such transfers, while slightly more express uncertainty on this issue. A roughly comparable question in the 1985 Decima poll, which further specified that "enrolments at the public school were no longer high enough to remain open," found transfers supported by over 70 percent of Ontario respondents. In contrast, the 1988 Environics poll of Metropolitan Toronto, which described enrolment levels only by noting that some public schools were not filled to capacity and further specified that the public school students would be bused to other public schools, found 60 percent opposed to school transfers. While both the Decima and Environics poll items may be criticized as leading questions, our own results suggest that there is not yet a strong consensus on this issue.

Table 9 further summarizes the significant social divisions concerning school transfers. As with extended Catholic funding, strong majorities of Catholics and francophones support school transfers to the Catholic system, whereas there is only minority support and greater uncertainty among other religious groups. Those of non-European ethnic background express both the least support and most uncertainty concerning school transfers. As might be expected, the majority of those who support extended funding also support school transfers from the public system, whereas only a minority of those who prefer more restricted funding support transfers. ☐

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SEVENTH
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Extension of Educational Services

Public education systems face continuing demands to expand or modify the services they provide. In this survey, we assess the extent of popular support for several recent demands of quite varied generality, namely: early childhood education, heritage languages, general level of education needed to get along in society or "modal needed education," postsecondary program quotas, and uses of vacant school space.

Early Childhood Education

School boards throughout Ontario have begun to implement junior kindergarten programs for four year olds. Recommendations have been made for universally available public education from the age of three, most recently by the Ontario Study of the Relevance of Education and the Issue of Dropouts (Radwanski, 1987). Our question asks from what age respondents think school boards should be required to provide childhood education.

Table 10: "From what age do you think that all school boards in Ontario should be required to provide childhood education?"

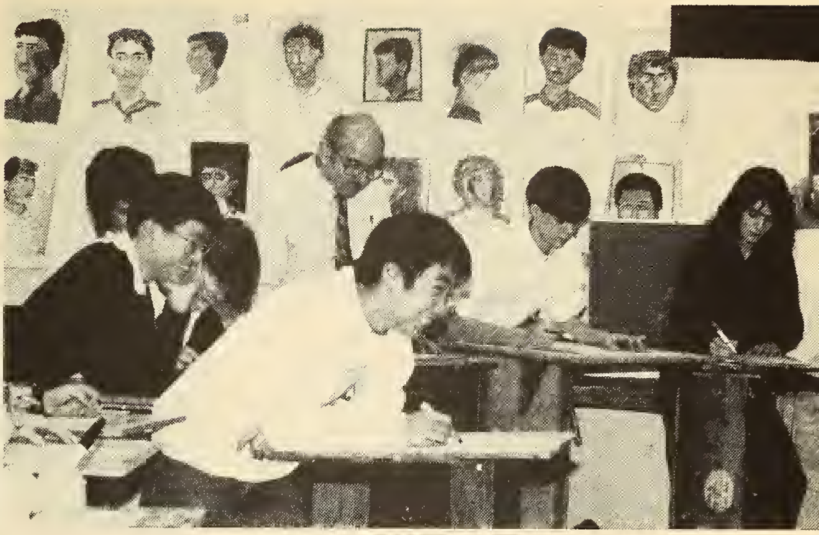
	3 years or younger %	4 years %	5 years %	6 years or older %	Don't know/ Not stated %	N
All respondents	8	33	51	6	2	1,011
Age						
17-24	13	38	42	5	2	147
25-34	10	41	41	6	2	243
35-44	10	36	48	6	1	196
45-54	7	30	55	8	1	139
55-64	3	25	62	8	2	147
65+	3	20	68	2	7	129
Sex						
Mole	8	28	54	8	2	489
Female	7	38	48	4	2	522
Contact with schools						
Self or spouse attending	16	32	43	9	0	35
Child at elementary only	13	47	36	4	1	209
Children at elementary and high school	3	29	65	3	0	60
Child at high school only	2	21	70	7	0	52
Child at postsecondary only	10	41	38	9	3	42
Children at postsecondary and other level	4	29	49	15	4	27
No formal contact	7	29	55	6	3	586
Ethnic group						
British	6	30	56	6	2	553
French	6	42	41	8	4	86
Other European	8	24	51	5	3	270
Non-European	24	39	32	4	1	88
Occupational class						
Corporate executives	2	23	65	6	4	123
Small employers	8	19	71	3	0	35
Self-employed	12	26	55	6	0	31
Managers	11	30	52	8	0	47
Professional employees	9	39	45	6	1	76
Supervisors	12	33	50	5	1	154
Non-industrial workers	7	33	52	6	3	121
Industrial workers	7	33	52	6	3	106
Unemployed	20	51	25	0	5	21
Homemakers	4	39	48	5	3	178
Retired	6	17	70	5	3	118
Students	13	42	36	7	2	61

Table 11: "For ethnic minority students in elementary school, instruction should be made available in their parents' heritage language during the school day whenever numbers warrant."

	Agree %	Disagree %	Neither/ Not stated %	N
All respondents	20	64	16	1,011
Religion				
Protestant	17	71	12	511
Catholic	27	53	10	324
Jewish	16	49	35	24
Other	40	42	18	25
No religion	15	74	11	127
Ethnic group				
British	17	72	12	553
French	30	46	25	86
Other European	19	63	19	270
Non-European	37	41	23	88
Occupational class				
Corporate executives	9	85	6	123
Small employers	22	78	0	35
Self-employed	14	73	13	31
Managers	22	74	4	47
Professional employees	17	74	9	76
Supervisors	20	65	16	154
Non-industrial workers	20	63	17	121
Industrial workers	24	59	18	106
Unemployed	14	77	10	21
Homemakers	19	60	22	178
Retired	19	66	15	118
Students	31	48	21	61

Table 13: "The number of students admitted to university and community college programs should be based primarily on the availability of jobs for graduates, even if this keeps out qualified students who want these programs."

	Agree %	Disagree %	Neither/ Not stated %	N
All respondents				
1979	37	53	10	1,084
1982	37	52	11	1,050
1986	25	61	14	1,042
1988	19	64	18	1,011
Occupational class				
Corporate executives	10	84	7	123
Small employers	32	58	10	35
Self-employed	15	62	23	31
Managers	14	74	12	47
Professional employees	20	71	10	76
Supervisors	23	64	13	154
Non-industrial workers	17	64	19	121
Industrial workers	20	57	24	106
Unemployed	41	59	0	21
Homemakers	14	63	23	178
Retired	17	61	23	118
Students	11	74	15	61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As Table 10 indicates, a bare majority support continuing childhood education from age five. One-third support extension to four year olds. Less than 10 percent favour extension downward to three years or younger, and a similar proportion would like to see public education restricted to those six years or older. There is a tendency for women to be more supportive than men of childhood education at four. Younger people are more supportive of extending public education to children under age five. Those who are attending school themselves or have children at elementary school are more supportive than those with no formal contact with schools. Non-European ethnic groups are most likely to support earlier childhood education. Among occupational classes, the strongest support for extending childhood education programs comes from students and the unemployed.

Heritage Language

The Ontario government has recently responded to demands from ethnic minorities with legislation requiring school boards to offer instruction in heritage languages beyond the regular school day when requested to do so by parents of at least 25 students. Our question assesses support for the further demand to integrate heritage language instruction into the regular school day.

As Table 11 shows, a definite majority of Ontarians currently oppose integration of heritage language instruction into the regular school day, while only one-fifth support this proposition. Support is strongest among non-European ethnic groups and those of non-Judaeo-Christian religious affiliations, but even here opposition appears to be at least as likely as support. There are also significant differences among occupational classes in the strength of their opposition, with corporate executives almost unanimously opposing integrating heritage languages into the regular school day, and only students expressing less than majority opposition.

Table 12: "How much education do you think a person now needs to have in order to get along in this society."

	%	N
Elementary school	2	15
Vocational high school	8	82
Academic high school	23	234
Community college or trade school	40	403
University undergraduate school	11	114
Graduate degree	13	136
Don't know	3	26
	100	1,011

Modal Needed Education

Prior OISE surveys have explored in some detail the public's perceptions about relations between educational programs and labour market requirements (see Livingstone, Hart, & Davie, 1987). In 1988, our interest has been in more general views about how much formal education is needed to get along in this society. Responses to this question are summarized in Table 12. Nearly two-thirds of the respondents express the view that some form of postsecondary education is needed, with the plurality picking community college or trade school as the minimum needed. This pattern of perception prevails across virtually all social groupings. Only among those whose own educational attainment is elementary schooling is there less than majority support for the view that postsecondary education is needed to get along in this society. Thus, there is a substantial discrepancy between the minority of Ontarians who have actually obtained a postsecondary education and the strong majority view that it is necessary. This pattern should be kept in mind when considering the following questions on the extension of educational services.

Postsecondary Program Quotas

As postsecondary enrolments continued to grow faster than government funding through the past decade, calls frequently were made to restrict student entry. One such proposal would base entrant numbers primarily on the availability of jobs for graduates. As Table 13 summarizes, we have asked Ontarians about this proposal several times.

Nearly two-thirds now disagree with the suggestion that postsecondary access should be determined by the availability of jobs, while about one-fifth agree. Opposition to this idea has clearly grown in recent years. The only notable social divisions on this issue are now among occupational classes, with corporate executives, managers, professionals, and students most strongly opposed to quotas; but even among the unemployed, there is only minority agreement with quotas related to jobs.

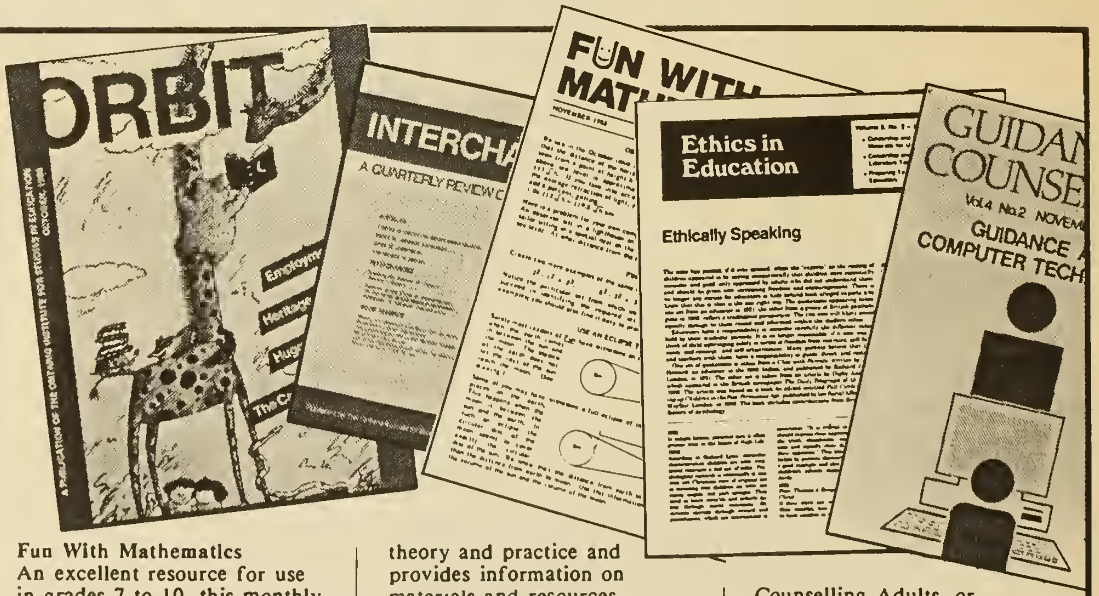
Use of Vacant School Space

Declining school enrolments have created opportunities for alternative uses of vacant school space. Earlier surveys found that the Ontario public had very little interest in the private sale of school buildings (Livingstone & Hart, 1981; Ontario Ministry of Education, 1979). A wide variety of alternative educational and non-educational public uses have been suggested for vacant school space. The current preferences of Ontarians on such options are summarized in Table 14.

Table 14: "If a school in your community had some vacant space not required at present for the education of children or young people, which one of the following should have top priority to use the space?"

	%
Basic reading, writing and math courses for adults	33
English as a second language course for adults	7
High school education for adults	17
General interest/recreational courses for adults	5
Child care	16
Seniors' centres	5
Community and recreation centres	4
Other publicly funded social services	2
Leave space vacant for future student needs	5
Don't Know/Not Stated	6
N	1,011

Over 60 percent would now like to see vacant school space used to provide adult education programs, mainly basic literacy and numeracy or high school courses. About one-quarter would prefer to have the space used for other publicly funded services, mainly child care. Only a tiny minority would like to leave the space vacant for future student needs. While the earlier surveys cited above dealt with use of vacant school buildings rather than space within operating schools, there does appear to be increasing interest in educational as opposed to non-educational use of vacant school space. This expressed interest in adult education uses is consistent with the strong support for increased public funding of adult education programs cited earlier, as well as with the adult participation patterns discussed in a later section of this report. The pattern of priorities for use of vacant school space is very similar across all the social group distinctions we have studied. ☐



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Curriculum Objectives and Performance Ratings

Respondents to the 1988 OISE survey were asked to select their first and second curriculum priorities for elementary school from a list of objectives *excluding* basic (reading/writing, math) skills. Following this, respondents were asked to rate, separately for elementary and high schools, how well each of the objectives — this time including basic skills — was being met, that is, how well students were learning in each area.

Before examining the findings for these questions, some cautionary remarks are in order. The topic of curriculum priorities has been much researched, but with little consistency of approach. In addition, results and interpretations have been strongly influenced by the type of question asked. The area of curriculum priorities was a focus of our 1984 survey, and we refer readers to the report of that survey for a discussion of the impact of question format (see Livingstone, Hart, & Davie, 1985, pp. 30–40). One point in particular should be stressed here.

Different types of questions impose differing degrees of constraint on respondents. If the question is to rate the importance, separately, of each of ten curriculum objectives, respondents are free to rate all "very important" if they so believe — or none. If the question asks which of ten subjects should be compulsory, again all can be selected, but there may be an implied constraint operating through either reluctance to restrict individual choice or to overload the curriculum. Questions, such as the one used in this survey, which ask for a short list of ranked priorities from a much longer list of curriculum objectives, are clearly more constraining still. What is important to remember is that interpretations always need to take account of the constraints imposed by the format of the question. If a respondent rates all ten curriculum objectives as "very important," this should not be interpreted as an absence of priorities — priorities were not asked for. Similarly, it should not be assumed that a respondent naming two priorities does not consider other objectives "very important."

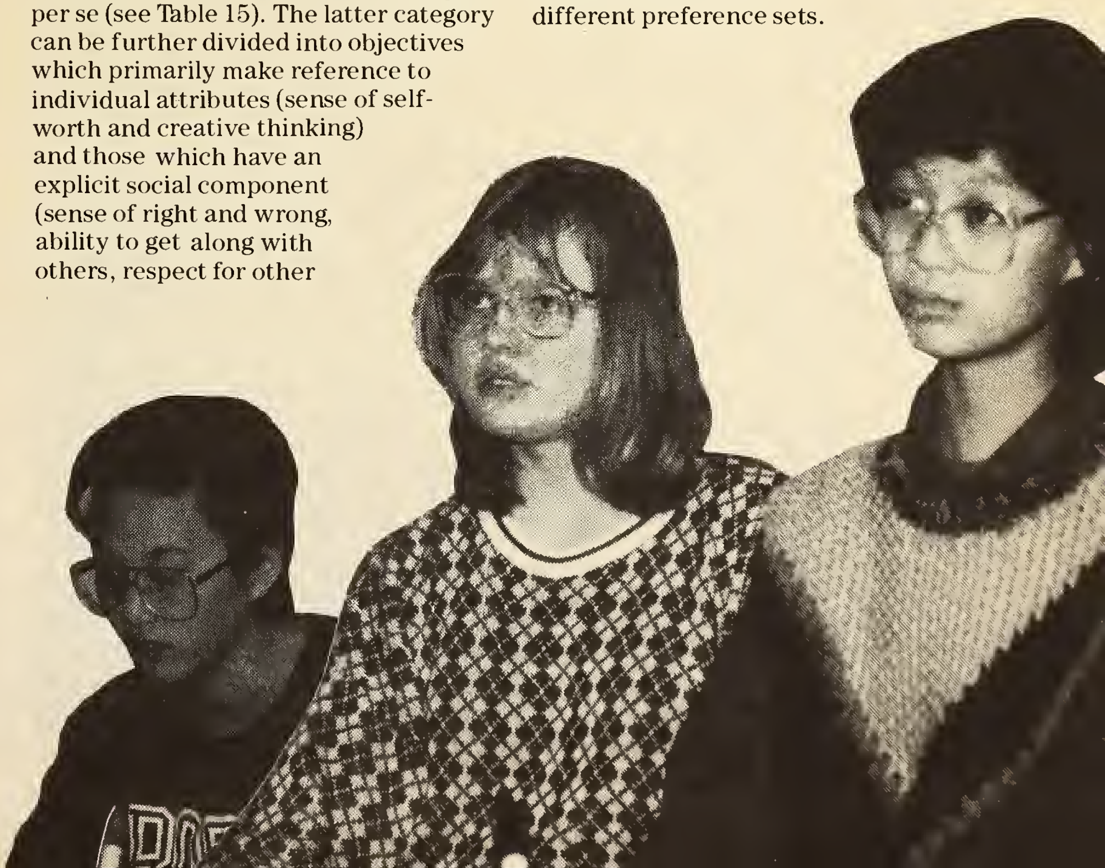
Curriculum Objectives at the Elementary Level

Our question on elementary school curriculum priorities represents a compromise between straight priority selection and importance rating questions. It was thought, based on prior research (e.g., Livingstone & Hart, 1980, p. 15; *Toronto Star*, 1987, p. 27), that basic reading/writing and math skills would dominate the selection from any list of objectives and that we would thus gain little information on the extent of diversity or consensus of opinion on second-order priorities. At the same time, however, an importance-rating question would not give respondents a chance to reveal their own priorities. We thus retained the format of asking for first and second priorities among objectives but we excluded basic skills from the list. We assured respondents in the question itself that basic skills were assumed to be a priority.

Curriculum objectives in the list are of two broad types: school subjects or quasi-subjects, and student abilities or orientations which relate to personal development rather than school subjects per se (see Table 15). The latter category can be further divided into objectives which primarily make reference to individual attributes (sense of self-worth and creative thinking) and those which have an explicit social component (sense of right and wrong, ability to get along with others, respect for other cultures, and questioning attitude toward T.V.). Objectives with an explicit social component comprise the majority of items within the personal development category.

Four curriculum objectives from the list each gained more than 10 percent of respondents' first choices and more than 20 percent of their first and second choices combined (see Table 15). The two objectives concerning individual attributes (sense of self-worth and creative thinking) are both included in the top four, as are one social development objective (sense of right and wrong) and one quasi-school subject (use of computers). Only one other objective, ability to get along with others, gained more than 15 percent of first and second choices combined. Science, French, and Canadian history and geography, together with respect for other cultures, gained 12 to 13 percent; others attracted less than 10 percent of combined choices.

An examination of the relationship between first and second choices reveals some distinct patterns suggesting that the top four rankings reflect two different preference sets.



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The first represents a focus on personal development, mainly oriented to individual attributes rather than to the social development of students. The second set is focussed on academic learning, linking the use of computers as a priority with academic subjects. There are few differences by social background in the selection of curriculum priorities.

Performance Ratings for Elementary and High Schools

After selecting their curriculum priorities at the elementary level, respondents were asked to rate both elementary and secondary schools on the achievement of these objectives plus on the teaching of reading/writing and mathematics skills. Using a common list of curriculum objectives for both levels meant dropping one of the high priority curriculum objectives for high schools — namely job training (see Livingstone, Hart, & Davie, 1985, p. 31). It should also be noted that to deal adequately with job training would have required a question which differentiated priorities and performance ratings according to the destination of students after graduation. The public does not, in contrast to most other objectives, see this priority as equally important to all students (see Livingstone, Hart, & Davie 1985, pp. 35-40; Ontario Ministry of Colleges and Universities, 1976, pp. 128-129).

Table 16 summarizes performance ratings in terms of the percentage of respondents who provide ratings of "very well" or "somewhat well" on a scale completed by the options "somewhat poorly" and "very poorly." On most objectives at both the elementary and high school level, a majority provide ratings of at least "somewhat well."

If we assume, based on past research, that literacy (reading/writing) and mathematics skills are very highly ranked public priorities, then elementary schools receive high ratings on three top priorities — these two plus use of computers. ("High" here means that at least 60 percent of respondents supply ratings of at least "somewhat well.") High schools receive strong ratings on mathematics and use of computers. The major difference between assessments of elementary and high school performance concerns ratings of at least how well students are learning reading and writing skills. At the elementary level, 61 percent provide a rating of at least "somewhat well" compared to 39 percent supplying ratings of "somewhat" or "very" poorly. At the high school level, the figures are 48 and 52 percent respectively.

Table 15: "Most people agree that students should learn basic reading, writing and math skills in elementary school. Below are listed other possible areas of learning. Which one of these do you think is the most important for children to learn in elementary school? Which is the second most important?"

	Most Important %	Second Most Important %
Science	7	5
French	7	5
Use of computers	14	10
Canadian geography and history	6	7
Sense of self-worth, confidence	17	11
Sense of right and wrong	15	13
Ability to get along with others	6	11
Appreciation of arts and music	1	1
Physical fitness, health	3	5
Creative thinking, independent problem-solving	16	17
Questioning attitude toward T.V. and other mass media	1	1
Respect for other cultures, beliefs and languages	4	9
Can't say/not stated	3	4
N	1,011	1,011

Both elementary and high schools fare less well on performance ratings concerning the personal development objectives highly valued for elementary school. Less than half of respondents think students are learning a sense of right and wrong at least "somewhat well" in elementary or high schools. In the case of learning a sense of self-worth and creative thinking, 50 to 54 percent supply a rating of "very" or "somewhat" well at both levels.

Differences by social background appear in performance ratings for selected curriculum objectives. Age, contact with schools, and occupational class are the main variables involved. Table 17 presents the distribution of these variables vis à vis respondents' ratings of how well students are learning reading and writing and a sense of right and wrong. The proportion of positive ratings for the teaching of reading and writing declines with age for both elementary and high schools; it also declines for the teaching of a sense of right and wrong for elementary schools only. For both curriculum objectives, those with no formal contact with the school system are less likely to offer positive performance ratings overall; those who are students themselves or whose spouse or partner is a student are more likely to do so. Parents of children in elementary and high school also offer higher performance ratings on average for elementary schools than those having no formal contact with the schools. However, in evaluating high schools, those with children in elementary school make similar assessments to those without formal contact with the

Table 16: "How well do you think students are learning the following ...?"[1,2]

	Elementary Level Very or somewhat well		High School Level Very or somewhat well	
	%	N	%	N
Reading and writing	61	921	48	887
Math	67	904	65	883
Science	70	847	74	855
French	59	841	58	821
Use of computers	76	835	83	845
Canadian geography and history	49	863	52	848
Sense of self-worth, confidence	51	869	50	836
Sense of right and wrong	49	887	45	853
Ability to get along wth others	66	894	60	855
Appreciation of arts and music	51	854	53	827
Physical fitness, health	75	917	72	882
Creative thinking, independent problem-solving	50	865	54	846
Questioning attitude toward T.V. and other mass media	35	819	46	796
Respect for other cultures, beliefs and languages	50	875	51	835

---

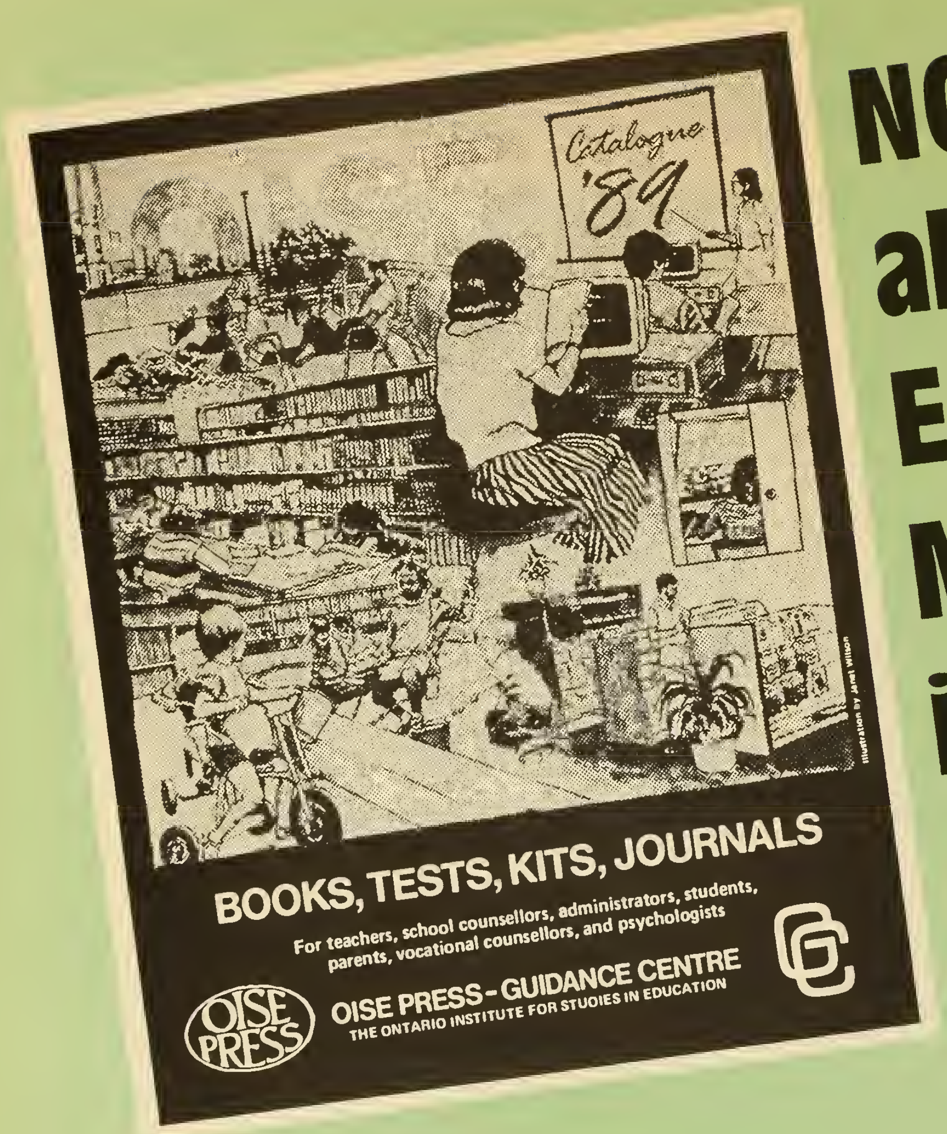
1. Based on those offering an opinion
2. Full scale: 1 = very well, 2 = somewhat well, 3 = somewhat poorly, 4 = poorly.

Table 17: Performance Ratings for Selected Curricular Objectives by Background

	% 'very well' or 'somewhat well'				
	Reading and writing		Sense of right and wrong		
	Elementary Schools	High Schools	Elementary Schools	High Schools	N
Age					
18-24	71	53	53		147
25-34	60	42	43		243
35-44	62	42	47		196
45-54	58	41	44		139
55-64	49	38	36		147
65 +	26	28	30		129
Contact with schools					
Self or spouse attending	71	62	59	52	35
Child at elementary only	65	41	53	35	209
Children at elementary and high school	69	63	52	52	60
Child at high school only	63	66	61	60	52
Child at post-secondary only	57	43	40	37	42
Children at post-secondary and other level	70	56	36	46	27
No formal contact	49	37	37	34	586
Occupational class					
Corporate executives	38	15	26	20	110
Small employers	53	43	37	40	35
Self-employed	56	42	41	28	31
Managers	63	34	49	35	47
Professional employees	58	42	46	33	76
Supervisors	63	38	45	48	154
Non-industrial workers	66	48	48	38	121
Industrial workers	66	63	45	44	106
Unemployed	48	23	43	34	21
Homemakers	50	37	37	30	178
Retired	30	34	35	41	118
Students	72	61	59	45	61

schools. Only parents of students currently in high school more often register positive ratings.

The most consistent occupational class difference is between corporate executives and industrial workers, with the latter much more likely to offer positive evaluations of instruction in reading/writing and in personal moral development. Almost as consistent is the contrast between the retired and students, with students more frequently making positive ratings. We also note here that a much smaller proportion of corporate executives than any other occupational class (14 percent) think high school students are learning creative thinking and independent problem-solving well. There are no significant differences by age or contact with schools in performance ratings for this objective at either the elementary or high school level. ☐



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High School Organization

At the time of the current survey, the Select Committee on Education was holding public hearings on the organization of education in Ontario. The report of the Ontario Study of the Relevance of Education and the Issue of Dropouts (Radwanski, 1987), which directly influenced the terms of reference of this committee, and the content of the briefs presented (Porter & Gardner, 1988) focussed on high school organization. The main topics considered by both the Committee and Radwanski were the general issues of student streaming and student assessment, while the latter, of course, also emphasized the specific problem of high school dropouts. In the following three sections, we present our survey findings on some of the central questions in each of these areas.

Student Streaming

The key recommendations of the Radwanski report with regard to streaming were: (1) that homogeneous ability grouping for instruction be replaced by heterogeneous ability grouping; (2) that advanced, general, and basic programs of study be replaced by a common program for all students; and (3) that optional credit courses preparing students for different futures be eliminated at least until Grade 11. Our findings on relevant items are summarized below.

1. *Ability Grouping* — As Table 18 shows, Ontarians in general are currently quite closely divided on whether they would like to see students grouped by the same or by different ability levels for classroom instruction. A bare majority express support for homogeneous ability grouping, but only slightly less appear to favour heterogeneous grouping. This pattern is found across all social background factors, suggesting that all major social groups are divided on the issue.

Table 18: "How would you like to see students put together in classes in terms of ability?"

	%
Students of same ability put together for most subjects	51
Students of different abilities put together for most subjects	44
Don't Know	5
N	1,011

2. *Program Streams* — The organizational issue which has attracted most attention in recent education debates in Ontario is whether students should continue to be separated into advanced, general, and basic programs of study or given a common program of study. Much of this debate has been provoked by research findings of a striking correlation between being in general and basic programs and the likelihood of dropping out of high school (see Radwanski, 1987); public views on the connection between program streams and dropping out will be assessed in a later section. The current extent of support for differentiated versus common high school programs in general is summarized in Table 19.

A plurality of Ontarians now oppose the abolition of different high school programs of study, but an only slightly lower proportion support the introduction of a common program, and the remaining one-fifth express uncertainty. These general sentiments of division and uncertainty are differentially held across some major social groups. Younger people tend to be more opposed to abolishing different

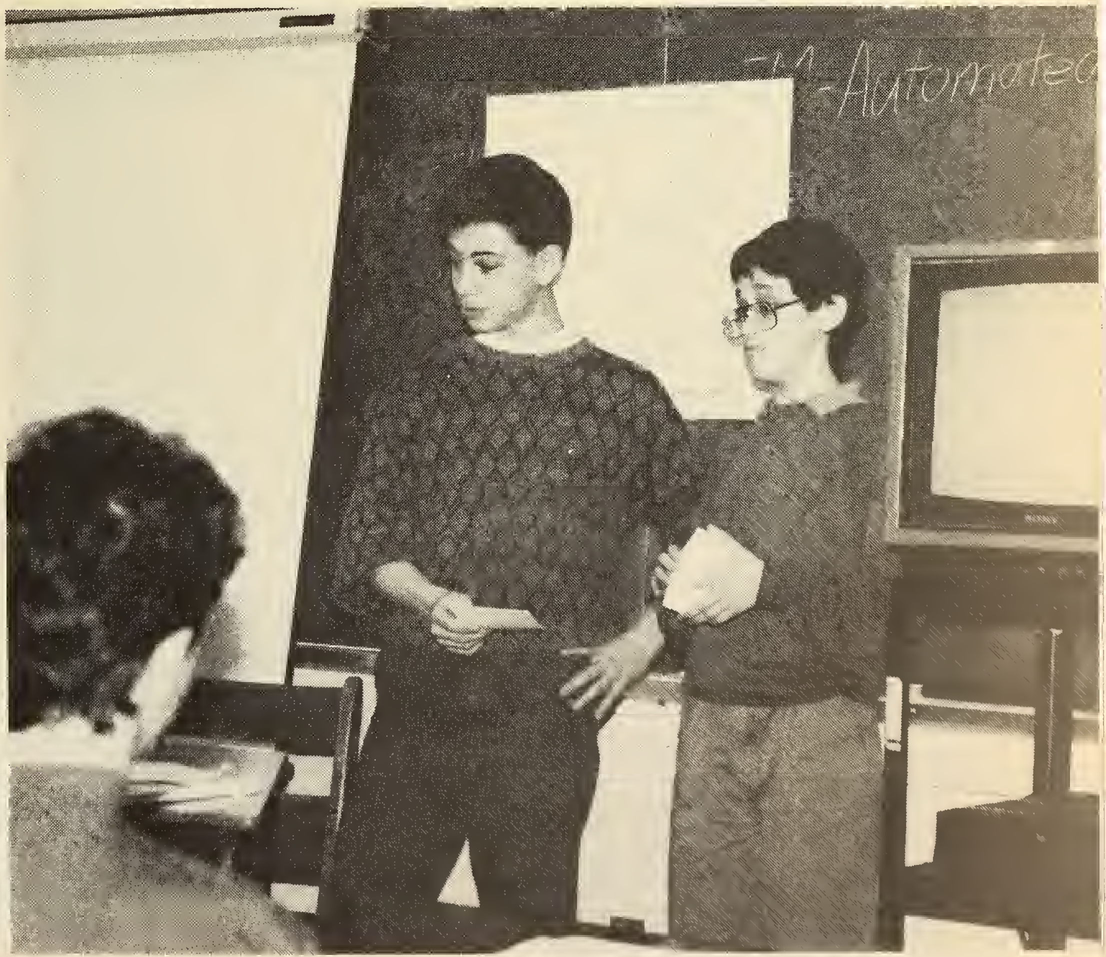

Photo by Humberto Solar

Table 19: "Do you agree or disagree that the current policy of separating high school students into advanced, general and basic programs of study should be abolished and replaced by a common program of study for all students?"

	Agree %	Disagree %	Neither/ Don't know %	N
All respondents	37	44	20	1,011
Age				
18-24	35	53	12	147
25-34	32	51	17	243
35-44	37	45	19	196
45-54	39	39	23	139
55-64	39	37	24	147
65 +	46	29	25	129
Education				
Elementary	41	30	29	131
High school incomplete	42	36	22	197
High school complete	36	42	22	250
Non-university post-secondary	33	50	17	211
University	35	55	11	221
Occupational class				
Corporate executives	30	59	11	123
Small employers	40	47	13	35
Self-employed	40	42	18	31
Managers	30	61	9	47
Professional employees	31	58	11	76
Supervisors	45	37	18	154
Non-industrial workers	40	40	20	121
Industrial workers	42	38	20	106
Unemployed	38	38	23	21
Homemakers	39	36	26	178
Retired	40	33	27	118
Students	19	77	4	61

Table 20: At which grade, if at all, should the schools stream or separate students into different programs intended to prepare some students directly for the world of work and other students for entry into community college or university?

	Not at all %	Grade 12 or 13 %	Grade 11 %	Grade 10 %	Grade 9 %	Don't know/ Not stated %	N
All respondents							
1980	5	12	18	21	39	5	1,108
1982	7	19	16	17	36	5	1,050
1988	10	16	17	20	30	8	1,011

Table 21: Province-wide tests should be used to assess the individual performance of high school students."

	Agree %	Disagree %	Neither/ Not stated %	N
All respondents				
1984	66	20	14	1,046
1988	62	23	16	1,011
Occupational class				
Corporate executives	81	9	10	123
Small employers	69	15	17	35
Self-employed	77	6	17	31
Managers	51	36	12	47
Professional employees	72	24	4	76
Supervisors	67	18	15	154
Non-industrial workers	55	36	10	121
Industrial workers	57	24	19	106
Unemployed	48	34	19	21
Homemakers	59	20	21	178
Retired	69	12	19	118
Students	52	32	17	61
Views on best way of judging academic progress				
Teachers' assessments	43	43	14	152
Teachers' tests	46	34	20	336
Provincial tests supplement teachers' tests	81	10	10	341
Provincial tests most important	88	3	9	118

program streams than older people. The more highly educated are more opposed than those with less formal schooling. Among occupational classes, majorities of corporate executives, managers, professional employees, and especially students oppose abolishing program streaming, while most other occupational groups express deeper division and greater uncertainty. There is also a significant general relationship between views on program streams and ability grouping, with a strong majority of those opposing a common program of study also favouring homogeneous ability grouping, while a majority of those supporting a common program favour mixed ability grouping.

3. Streaming Toward Work or Further Education — Beyond the general principle of common or differentiated program streams, there is the more specific issue of *when*, if at all, during high school students should be given different courses preparing some for the world of work and others for postsecondary schooling. We have asked Ontarians about the timing of this decision in several surveys, as Table 20 summarizes.

Currently, there is only very small minority support for entirely eliminating courses from high school that differentially prepare students for the work world or further eduction; there is bare majority support for doing so by grade 10, while one-third would prefer that such differential preparation begin in Grade 11 or beyond. There does appear, however, to have been a decline in the consensus for beginning differential preparation before grade 11, with support dropping from 60 percent in 1980 to 50 percent in 1988. It is notable that managers continue to be the occupational class most strongly in favour of early differential preparation. There is also a predictable general relationship between views on program streaming in principle and the timing of differentiation, with those who oppose a common program of study most strongly in favour of early selection.

Testing and Assessment

Since the elimination of the grade 13 departmental examinations in 1967, no formal province-wide tests (that is province-wide administration of the same tests) have been used in Ontario to determine all or part of students' grades or marks. Teachers, of course, frequently use tests to assess students, either constructing these themselves or using tests developed elsewhere. Local boards frequently use tests to monitor and assess the success of *programs* rather than individual students. The provincial Ministry of Education has adopted a similar strategy (the Ontario Provincial Review Program), which would allow comparison of boards and possibly schools by program/subject across Ontario. The Ministry has recently gone a step further. Guidelines have been issued to teachers regarding how to construct and mark teacher-made tests. The stated objective is to improve consistency in student assessment without recourse to the re-instatement of province-wide common tests. This initiative is aimed at producing greater consistency in the marks or grades awarded individual students according to province-wide standards, not to assess school programs. This latest move by the Ministry has been undertaken in the context of an increasingly vocal debate over re-instatement of a testing program analogous to the grade 13 departmental exams abandoned in 1967 (and possible implementation of a testing program covering lower grades as well).

In 1984 and again this year,

Table 22: "Which one of the following do you think is the best way of judging the academic progress of students in the higher grades?"

	The individual teacher should have sole responsibility for making assessments %	Assessments should be based on tests set jointly by teachers in the school %	Provincial tests should be used to supplement teacher-made tests %	Provincial tests should be most important %	Don't know/ Not stated %	N
All respondents						
1979	17	34	33	11	5	1,084
1982	19	30	37	12	2	1,056
1988	15	33	34	12	6	1,011
Education				14	13	131
Elementary	14	35	24	12	7	197
Secondary incomplete	17	35	30	12	6	250
Secondary complete	15	34	33	8	4	211
Non-university				14	3	221
postsecondary	16	37	35			
University	13	26	43	32	3	104
Corporate executives[1]	5	11	50			

1. Distributions for occupational classes in the main sample do not differ significantly from one another or the overall distribution for all respondents. Corporate executives differ significantly from all other occupational classes in their support for use of provincial tests, in general, and as the most important assessment instrument in particular.

respondents to the OISE survey were asked whether they agreed or disagreed with using province-wide tests to assess the individual performance of high school students. In both years, a majority have favoured province-wide tests (see Table 21). In 1984, province-wide testing was somewhat more frequently supported by those 45 to 54 years of age and by the university educated. These differences have largely disappeared in 1988. Corporate executives, however, remain more supportive than industrial or non-industrial workers.

The issue of whether to re-institute province-wide testing is not a simple one. In each year that we have asked respondents' preferences on this issue, we have also included a question relevant to debates about the impact of such testing. In 1984, respondents were asked who should have the greatest influence in deciding what is taught "in public schools here." This item was added in response to the widely argued claim that whoever controls the test, controls the curriculum, since teachers, on pre-1967 experience, will teach to the test. (Opponents of province-wide testing cite this as a major argument against testing; proponents have, in general, favoured more centralized control and streamlining of curriculum). In 1984, respondents were almost evenly divided between favouring a predominant local influence (school boards, teachers, parents) or provincial (or federal) influence over what is taught in local schools (Livingstone, Hart, & Davie, 1985, pp. 23–26). While a majority favoured province-wide testing, there was no major support for provincial control of curriculum if this was a consequence of testing.

In the 1988 OISE survey, we included a question originally asked in 1979 and repeated in 1982. Respondents were asked what was the best way of judging the academic progress of students, with options ranging from assessments by individual teachers to primary emphasis on provincial tests (see Table 22).

As in the case of support for provincial tests (although over a longer period), the distribution of responses to this question is essentially stable over time. Relatively small minorities prefer either assessments by individual teachers or emphasis on province-wide tests. Respondents group themselves in the middle categories favouring, almost equally, assessments based on tests set locally (jointly by teachers in the school) or teacher-made tests supplemented by provincial tests. One interpretation of these results is that respondents are seeking a balance between consistency or comparability of test results and "sensitivity to local conditions." There are few differences by social background in views on this issue. Those with university education are more likely to favour using provincial tests as a supplement to teacher-made tests than those with elementary education only (however, similar small minorities of both groups think provincial tests should be most important). Corporate executives are more likely than other occupational classes to think that provincial tests should be most important, and there is a very strong consensus (82 percent) within this group that province-wide tests should be part of any optimum system of student assessment.

The relationship between responses to the above question and the question on provincial tests suggests caution in interpreting the meaning of poll results apparently indicating broad majority support for re-instatement of "departmental" type examinations (see Table 21). The question on whether to use provincial tests to assess individual students does not allow respondents to indicate what priority they wish to see accorded to such tests in assessing students. The results of the best method of assessment question suggest only a small minority want province-wide tests to have priority. By examining the relationship between responses to the best method of assessment and the province-wide test questions, we can gain more understanding of the issue. Over 80 percent of those who support using provincial tests to supplement teachers' tests as the best method of assessing students agree with using provincial tests to assess individual performance. These respondents constitute 44 percent of those who

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agree with provincial tests; those who think provincial tests should be *most important* (as the best method of assessment) constitute only 17 percent. Those who *reject* province-wide tests (even as a supplement) as the *best* way to assess students represent 36 percent of those who agree with provincial tests (even though less than half so agree). In other words, 80 percent of those who agree with using provincial tests to evaluate individual students come from two groups — those who reject provincial tests as the best method to assess students, and those who regard provincial tests as a useful *supplement* to teacher-made tests.

One other recent Ontario opinion poll provides indirect evidence of the "softness" of support for province-wide testing as the primary means of assessing students. The *Toronto Star* (1987, pp. 13–14) poll asked a series of questions on this issue. By large majorities (70 percent or more), parents agreed that "province-wide testing would provide "better opportunities" to evaluate student, teacher, and school performance. Similarly, large majorities thought standards should be higher, and agreed that "province-wide standards or tests of skill should be established in certain subject areas." However, less than half (46 percent) of parents agreed that "province-wide examinations should be given before a student can enter secondary school." Standards and testing command majority support; the *primacy* of province-wide tests in assessing student performance does not.

High School Dropouts

The publication of the high drop-out rates for Ontario high schools (30 to 40 percent) — particularly concentrated in the general and basic program streams — and the public discussion surrounding the Radwanski report have substantially raised the public profile of the drop-out problem. The 1988 OISE survey included items on four aspects of public opinion in this area: (1) awareness that children from some social backgrounds are at greater risk of dropping out than others; (2) the effect of streaming on dropping out; (3) perceptions of how well students are prepared to choose between dropping out and staying in school, particularly in relation to their preparation for other educational choices; and (4) beliefs about the most effective way to reduce the number of dropouts.

1. Awareness of High-Risk Groups — Two recent studies of dropouts (Karp, 1988; Sullivan, 1988) have contributed to documenting that the incidence of leaving school before graduation is higher for students from lower income families, from families where the father is a blue-collar worker, and from families where fathers or mothers have not completed high school. While these studies do not provide data for ethnicity

Table 23: Perceptions of Student Groups with High Risk of Dropping Out of High School

	Agree %	Disagree %	Neither/ Not stated %	N
Students from low-income family backgrounds are much more likely to leave high school without a diploma than students from middle class families.	66	22	12	1,011
Occupational class				
Corporate executives	84	9	8	123
Small employers	66	24	10	35
Self-employed	58	19	22	31
Managers	75	15	10	47
Professional employees	75	19	6	76
Supervisors	70	24	6	154
Non-industrial workers	67	26	8	121
Industrial workers	59	23	18	106
Unemployed	56	30	14	21
Homemakers	61	20	19	178
Retired	63	22	15	118
Students	68	22	9	61
Students from some ethnic and immigrant groups are much more likely to leave high school without a diploma than students overall.	28	52	20	1,011

Table 24: "Do you think that a common program of study for all students would encourage students from low-income backgrounds to do better in school, or would it cause them to become discouraged or to drop out?"

	%
Yes, encourage	49
No, discourage	34
Don't know	17
N	1,011

Table 25: "How well do you think high school prepares students to choose ...?"

	Very Well %	Somewhat Well %	Somewhat Poorly %	Very Poorly %	Don't know/ Not stated %	N
Between dropping out of school or staying until graduation?	7	33	34	16	11	1,011
Between continuing their formal education or joining the workforce after high school graduation?	6	37	34	12	11	1,011
Between university or commuity college?	9	41	26	10	14	1,011

Table 26: "Which of the following, if any, do you think would be most effective in reducing the number of students who leave high school without getting a diploma?"

	Most Effective	Second Most Effective
Improving the quality of relationships between teachers and students	20	12
Providing more personal counselling	12	16
Making subjects more understandable by relating them more to students' interests and experience	26	23
Providing more remedial help and tutoring	9	18
Providing more programs combining school work with on the job training	28	25
Other	<1	<1
No action by the schools will be effective*	<1	<1
Don't Know/Not Stated	5	6
N	1,011	1,011

*Volunteered by respondents, not offered as a question option.

or immigration status, other studies have shown that students from particular ethnic groups are disproportionately streamed into the higher risk basic and general level programs (see Wright & Tsuji, 1983, pp. 54-56).

Respondents to the 1988 survey were asked whether they agreed or disagreed (and how strongly) with two statements about unequal drop-out rates among students from different social backgrounds. As shown in Table 23, two-thirds of respondents agreed that students from low-income family backgrounds are much more likely to leave high school without a diploma than students from middle-class families. However, less than a third agreed (52 percent disagreed) that students from some ethnic and immigrant groups had a higher incidence of dropping out of high school than students overall. Corporate executives are more likely than industrial workers to agree that students from low-income families have a high risk of dropping out. Otherwise, there is little association between social background and views on the question.

2. *Streaming and Dropouts* — In public discussions of whether to abolish (or at least postpone to the senior years) streaming within the high schools, proponents of a common program of study have argued that this will reduce the drop-out rate while opponents have argued that a common program will, in fact, worsen the problem. In our 1988 survey, we asked respondents what impact a move to a common program of study would likely have on one category of students already facing a high risk of dropping out. Specifically, respondents were asked whether they thought a common program would encourage students from low-income backgrounds to improve their performance or would discourage them even to the point of dropping out. The results are shown in Table 24. Almost half of respondents thought a common program of study would encourage students from low-income backgrounds, a third thought it would have the reverse effect.

There is essentially no relationship between views on this question and whether respondents agree or disagree that students from low-income backgrounds currently have a higher risk of dropping out than others. Similarly, views do not differ by the social location of respondents. However, those who think students from low-income backgrounds would be encouraged by a common program of study are much more likely than those who anticipate discouragement to favour abolishing streaming (56 versus 17 percent), and also more likely to favour putting students of differing abilities together in classes for most subjects (57 versus 31 percent).

3. *Perceptions of Students' Preparedness for Making Educational Decisions* — One recent Ontario-wide survey of dropouts (Karp, 1988) strongly suggests that students make the decision to leave school very much on their own. About half reported that their decision to quit school was "very sudden" rather than made over a period of time. Thirty-seven percent indicated that they did not discuss the decision with anyone. Only 21 percent talked to their teachers, guidance counsellors, or school administrators (Karp, 1988, p. 157). A second Ontario study (Sullivan, 1988, p. 41) found that only 37 percent had spoken to school staff before leaving school. These results indicate that the school's influence over the quality of students' decisions in most instances depends on how well students have been prepared to make educational choices rather than on "eleventh-hour" interventions by school staff.

The 1988 OISE survey asked respondents how well high schools were preparing students to make three educational choices. The first and most basic was the choice between dropping out and staying in high school until graduation. The second involved deciding whether to enter the workforce after high school graduation or continue formal education. The third concerned choices between university and community college for those continuing their education. As shown in Table 25, less than half of the respondents thought that the high schools prepared students at least "somewhat well" to make decisions about dropping out before graduation, and about continuing their education after graduation. Only in the case of decisions about whether to attend community college or university were respondents more likely to think students are well rather than poorly prepared (50 percent versus 36 percent). Opinion on students' preparedness to make educational choices is similar among all social groups defined by our background questions.

4. *Effective Strategies to Reduce the Number of Dropouts* — The final question dealing with the problem of dropouts asked respondents to select the most effective and the second most effective strategy to reduce the number of students leaving high school before graduation (see Table 26). (Very few respondents chose strategies outside the options offered in the question or indicated that no school-based strategies would be effective.) First choices highlight: (1) providing more programs combining school work with on-the-job training; (2) making subjects more understandable by relating them more to students' interests and experience; and (3) improving the quality of relationships between teachers and students. First and second choices taken together indicate priority for the first two of these options, which are selected by a majority (school-work programs) or near-majority (making subjects more relevant).

Overall, it appears that respondents do not think that the most effective means of reducing the drop-out rate are to be found in changing social relations within the schools. Improving the quality of student-teacher relations is cited (first and second choices combined) by slightly less than a third of respondents; more personal counselling, by slightly more than one in four. Providing more pedagogical support in the form of tutoring and remedial help is selected by a similar minority. Most respondents think that effective strategies involve taking account of students' experience and interests *beyond* the school — by incorporating these in "school work" and by extending formal educational experience beyond the classroom.

Echoes of this pattern can be found in the views of dropouts themselves. Both recent surveys of dropouts (Karp, 1988; Sullivan, 1988) indicate that the quality of student-teacher relationships and lack of counselling or tutorial help are not the main reason students leave. Disinterest in school and work-related factors (beyond money concerns) dominate distributions of students' reasons for leaving.

There are few background differences in choices of effective strategies to reduce the number of dropouts. Combining school work with on-the-job training is suggested by 59 percent (first and second choices) of those under 35, but by only 41 percent of respondents over 65. Corporate executives are less supportive of this strategy than most other occupational classes (32 percent versus 50 to 60 percent). ☐

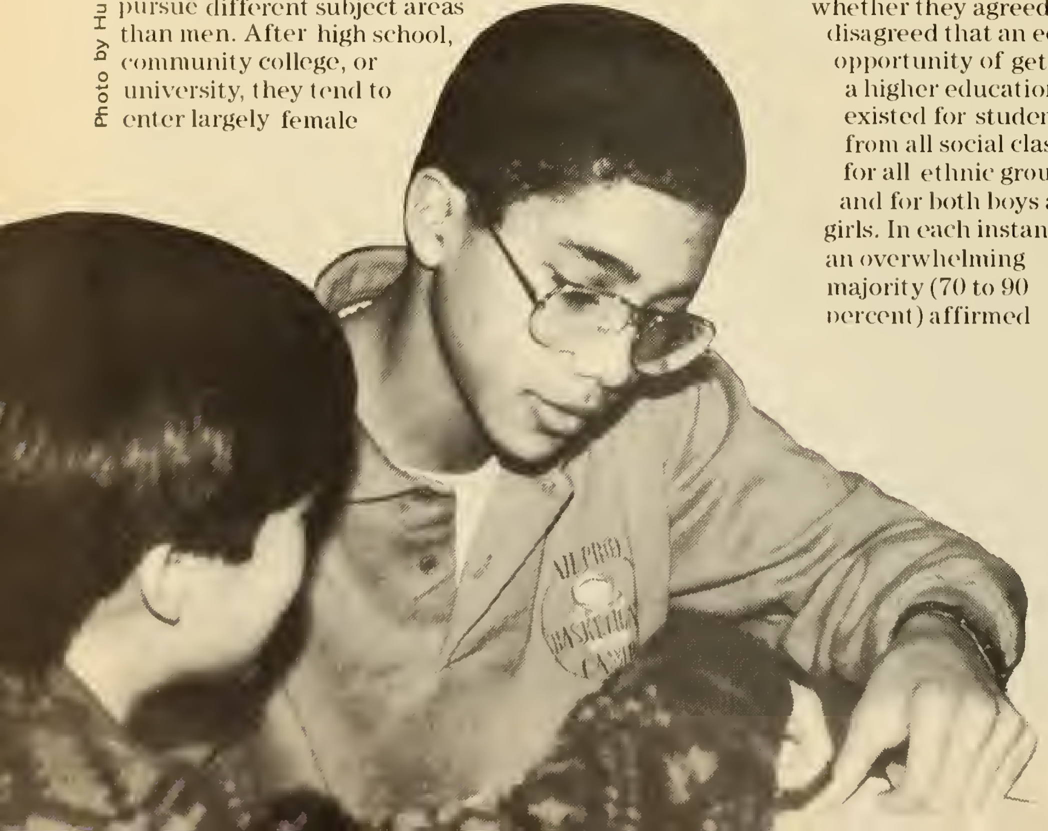
SEVENTH
OISE
SURVEY

Educational Inequalities

The 1988 OISE survey included two questions on education and social class inequalities repeated from earlier surveys. Two new questions on education and gender inequalities were included in 1988 (replacing items used in previous years). The outcomes of schooling for students from different social groups are demonstrably unequal. As previously noted, children from low-income families, from families where parents are working class, from families where parents have lower levels of education, all are more likely to end up in basic and general stream high school programs (see, for example, Wright & Tsuji, 1983), more likely to drop out (Karp, 1988; Sullivan, 1988), and less likely to go to university (see Anisef et al., 1982) than students from families with above average income and/or whose parents hold professional or managerial jobs or are university educated. (Clearly income, educational attainment, and occupational status of parents are often related.) In the case of gender, women are now about as likely as men to go to university (see Anisef et al., 1986, pp. 101–103; Ontario Ministry of Education, 1988, pp. 68–71). However, at both the secondary and postsecondary level, females pursue different subject areas than men. After high school, community college, or university, they tend to enter largely female "job ghettos" where salary, job status, and prospects for advancement are inferior to jobs taken by males with the same (or even lower level) educational attainments (see Devereaux & Rechnitzer, 1980; Secretary of State, 1986).

These inequalities persist despite widespread belief in the principle of equality of opportunity, and school and government programs intended to level the playing field. An enduring problem of public opinion research (and social theory) has been the widespread finding that the discrepancy between the cultural value of equal opportunity *for and through* education and the reality of persistent inequalities is little reflected in public opinion (see Livingstone, Hart, & Davie, 1985, p. 6). At least on questions which do not refer to concrete situations, or explicitly direct attention to the distinction between "ought" and "is" (see Carleton Journalism School, 1985), a consensus typically appears affirming the existence of educational and broad social equality.

The 1986 OISE survey provides a good example of this pattern (Livingstone, Hart, & Davie, 1987, p. 6). Respondents were asked whether they agreed or disagreed that an equal opportunity of getting a higher education existed for students from all social classes, for all ethnic groups, and for both boys and girls. In each instance, an overwhelming majority (70 to 90 percent) affirmed that equality of opportunity exists. Only in the case of gender is the statement approximately correct in terms of actual *outcomes* (see Anisef et al., 1986, pp. 102–103). However, equality of opportunity might also be narrowly interpreted as an absence of formal barriers. In 1988, we made a more determined effort to focus on respondents' perceptions of the process of schooling and outcomes.



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Class Inequalities

The 1988 survey repeated the question asked in 1986 (and two previous surveys) regarding whether students from all occupational classes have an equal opportunity/chance of getting a higher education. Also repeated was a question from the 1978 OISE survey which deals explicitly with outcomes. Respondents were asked whether they agreed or disagreed that "Schools serve to direct students to the same general levels in the labour force as their parents occupy." In 1978, this question did not produce the consensus typical of questions on educational equality, but a much more balanced division of opinion (see Table 27).

The results of re-administering these questions in the 1988 survey are shown in Table 27. On each question there is a consensus on the existence of educational equality. Sixty-two percent agree that students from all social classes have an equal opportunity of getting a higher education in Ontario today. This represents a significant decline from past surveys, but is still a substantial majority. Sixty-one percent disagree that schools serve to direct students to the same occupational class position as their parents. This represents a substantial change from the results of the 1978 survey (using a different methodology — see Table footnote) when this was a minority opinion.

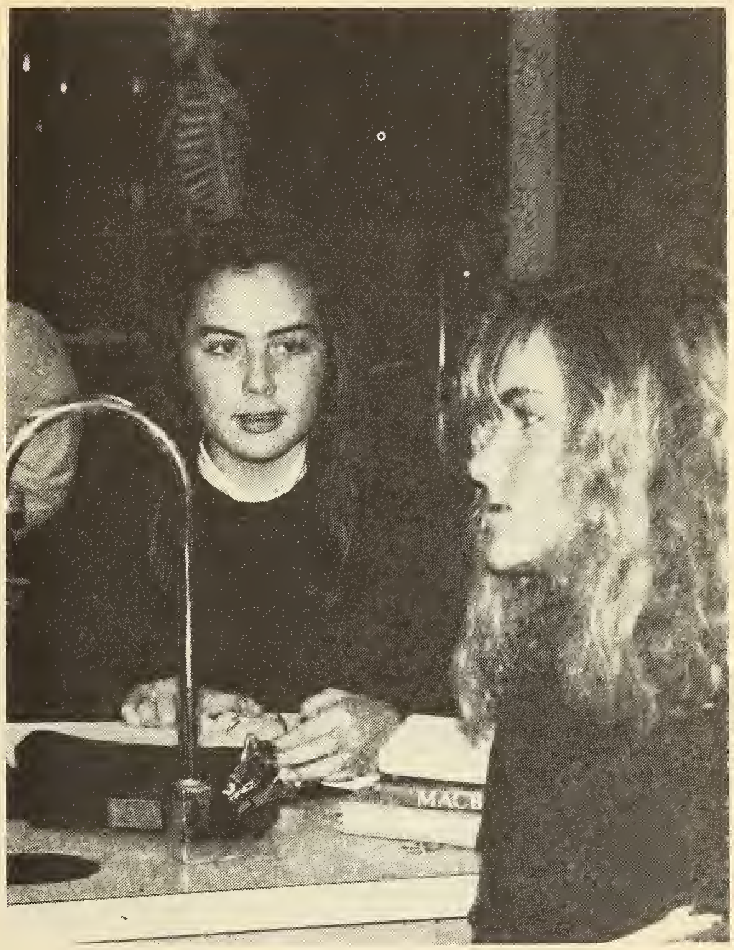
There are few differences in the distribution of opinion on these questions by social background. Those with elementary schooling only are less likely to disagree that schools direct students to the same occupational class as their parents than those with postsecondary education. However, similar proportions in each education category agree; those with elementary schooling only are more likely not to hold or offer an opinion. A similar though weaker pattern (at the margin of sampling error) appears with regard to family income and the question of equal opportunity of students from all social

Table 27: Perceptions of Educational Equality

	Agree %	Disagree %	Neither/ Not Stated %	N
In Ontario today, students from families of all occupational backgrounds such as managerial, professional, clerical and blue collar levels have an equal opportunity of getting a higher education.[1]				
1979	75	21	4	1,084
1984	69	23	8	1,046
1986	72	22	6	1,042
1988	62	26	12	1,011
Schools serve to direct students toward the same general levels in the labour force as their parents occupy.				
1978[2]	31	44	25	1,025
1988	19	61	20	1,011
Girls are now given as much encouragement as boys to pursue math and science programs and career.				
1988	78	11	11	1,011
Most women now graduating from university or community college get jobs with salaries that are as high as those of male graduates.				
1988	31	55	14	1,011

1. In some year 'chance' was used in place of 'opportunity'.

2. In 1978, the general population survey was conducted by mailed questionnaire using a different sampling procedure from subsequent OISE surveys. Caution should thus be used in comparing absolute figures between years. For a discussion of comparability issues see Livingstone and Hart, 1981, pp. 44-45.



Photos by Humberto Solar

classes to obtain a higher education. Those with family incomes below $10,000 are less likely to agree that equal opportunity exists than those with median or higher incomes. They are, however, no more likely to disagree, but more frequently do not state a definite opinion.

Nearly three-quarters of respondents state a definite opinion on both these questions. Of these, 54 percent disagree that schools direct students towards their parents' occupational class position *and* agree that students from all occupational classes have an equal opportunity of getting a higher education. Only seven percent both agreed with the statement regarding the directing role of schools *and* disagreed with the statement on equal opportunity. This pattern essentially reflects the basic distributions of opinion on these two questions. There is, in fact, little relationship between the responses to these items.

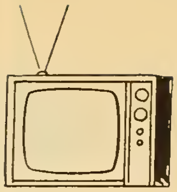
Gender Inequalities

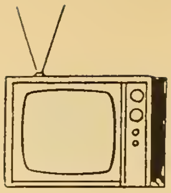
The 1988 survey included two new questions on education and gender inequality, both focussing on issues of female "ghettos." The first asked whether girls now receive as much encouragement as boys to pursue math and science programs and careers. The second question dealt with differences in the labour market rewards for male and female university graduates. Respondents were asked whether the jobs obtained by most female postsecondary graduates paid as well as jobs obtained by males. Results for both these questions are presented in Table 27.

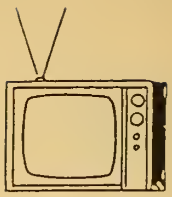
By a large majority, respondents agree with the statement that girls get as much encouragement as boys to continue with mathematics and science. This can be seen as a very optimistic assessment, given the persuasive and often subtle discouragements to women students that educators have found (see Whiton, 1986; Wiggan, 1983). There are no differences in views on this issue by sex, even among younger age groups, nor do parents of elementary and high school students hold distinctive views. Corporate executives are less likely to agree that girls receive equal encouragement than professional employees, industrial, and non-industrial workers.

A majority of respondents disagreed that most women postsecondary graduates obtain jobs with the same salary levels as those of men. Again, there are no differences in opinion by sex, even when controls are introduced for labour force participation and age. Respondents in the 18 to 24 age group are more likely to agree that salary levels are the same for male and female graduates than those 35 or older (46 percent versus 24 percent). This pattern persists when non-labour force participants are excluded. Those from non-European backgrounds are much more likely to agree than those from British backgrounds (78 percent versus 40 percent).

Respondents' views on equality of job outcomes for postsecondary graduates are related to their perceptions of the encouragement offered girls to pursue math and science studies. Eighty-two percent of those who disagree that girls receive as much encouragement as boys, compared to 53 percent of those who agree, also disagree that job outcomes are equal for female and male postsecondary graduates. ☐







SEVENTH OISE SURVEY

Adult and Continuing Education

Adult education continues to make up a large sector of education in our province. We have surveyed patterns of participation in 1984, 1986, and 1988 as well as asking a number of other questions related to adult education. In 1988, we again examined the number of adults who report having taken an adult education course in the past year. We also investigated who paid for the course and individual perceptions of the benefits that might result from taking a course to improve reading and writing skills. Finally, we looked at who watches and follows courses on educational television as well as perceptions of the value of educational television.

Participation in Adult Education

In 1988, we again asked about adult or continuing education courses taken in the past year. Table 28 indicates that about a quarter of respondents indicated that they had taken a course in the past year. This is a marginal increase from the results of the 1986 study, when 20 percent of the respondents indicated that they had taken a course in the past year. It is also an increase from the proportion of 20 percent reported for Ontario by Devereaux (1984, p. 4) in a survey undertaken in 1983.

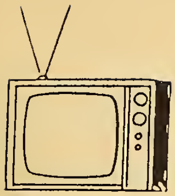
The leading types of courses taken are similar to the types reported in the 1986 OISE survey. Four percent of the respondents reported taking a course identified as job retraining, nine percent reported a course toward a community college certificate or university degree, and ten percent reported taking a general interest course.

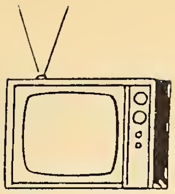
Table 28: "In the past year, have you taken any of the following types of adult or continuing education courses?"

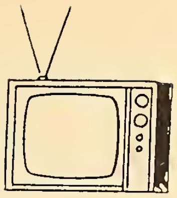
	1986 %	1988 %
Have taken a course	20	24
Job retraining	5	4
English as a second language (ESL)	<1	<1
Basic reading, writing and number skills	<1	<1
Courses toward a high school diploma	1	1
Courses toward a community college certificate or university degree	6	9
French as a second language	2	2
General interest courses	9	10
None of the above	74	72
Not applicable/Still in school-university	3	4
Don't know/Not stated	3	0
N	1,042	1,011

Table 29: Participation in Adult Education by Background

	Have taken an adult ed. course in past year %	Would consider a course on educational television %	N
All respondents	24	42	1,011
Age			
18-24	38	50	147
25-34	33	49	243
35-44	32	52	196
45-54	16	41	139
55-64	11	31	147
65 +	6	19	129
Education			
Elementary	5	20	131
High school incomplete	16	35	197
High school complete	23	40	250
Non-university post-secondary	35	51	211
University	36	53	221
Family income			
Under $10,000	28	38	56
$10,000 to $14,999	6	26	53
$15,000 to $19,000	13	21	60
$20,000 to $29,999	22	37	135
$30,000 to $39,999	22	41	156
$40,000 to $59,999	30	52	185
$60,000 and over	33	57	185
Occupational class			
Corporate executives	28	51	123
Small employers	25	44	35
Self-employed	23	41	31
Managers	31	64	47
Professional employees	43	53	76
Supervisors	40	47	154
Non-industrial workers	30	46	121
Industrial workers	16	44	106
Unemployed	25	36	21
Homemakers	12	34	178
Retired	4	22	118
Students	40	48	61







As in the past surveys, the patterns of participation remain highly correlated with age, prior education, family income, and occupational class (see Table 29). Participation is inversely related to age, with the largest proportion of adult education participants in the 18 to 24 age category. It is interesting to note that there has been a shift in participation rates in the two youngest age categories. In Devereaux's 1983 study (1984, p. 6), the highest participation rate was in the 25 to 34 age category. The same pattern was found in the 1984 OISE study, where the highest participation rate again was in the 25 to 34 age category. For the first time, the highest participation rate is now (by a small but significant margin) among those in the youngest age category who have completed their initial formal schooling. Participation is directly correlated with prior education, with the lowest rate in the category of those with elementary schooling and the highest rate in the category of those who have had university education. Among the postsecondary and university educated, participation rises to more than one in three adults having taken a course this past year, and individuals with postsecondary training are more than seven times as likely to have taken a course as those with only elementary training. This is the same as Devereaux (1984, p. 13) found in 1983.

Family income also is directly correlated with participation except for those respondents in the under $10,000 category. Participation rises from a low of six percent in the $10,000 to $14,999 category to 33 percent in the $60,000 and over category. Again, this is similar to past studies. The results for participation by occupational class are as might be expected. The three highest categories of participation are professional employees (42 percent), supervisors (40 percent), and students (40 percent). The lowest categories of participation are the retired (4 percent), homemakers (12 percent), and industrial workers (16 percent). Combining these variables, we are left with a description of adult education participation that is highly stratified by social class.

Who Pays for Courses

One explanation for the relationship between participation rates and social class may be in the financing of adult education. By far, the greatest source of fees and tuition for adult education is the individual. The first column in Table 30 shows the responses for all adult education courses. Sixty-two percent of the respondents report having paid for the course themselves. This is approximately the same percentage found for Canada by Devereaux in 1983 (1984, p. 39). In 1983, there was a major difference reported for males and females. Devereaux reported that males paid for approximately 49 percent of the courses themselves, while females paid for approximately 72 percent. In the present study, there is no significant difference between the proportion of males who paid for their own courses (64 percent) and the proportion of women who paid for their own courses (61 percent). If the Devereaux figures for all of Canada are applicable to

Table 30: "Who paid the fees or tuition for the course?"

	All adult education courses %	Excluding general education courses %
Self	62	57
Family	6	7
Employer	22	24
Other	10	12
N	242	153

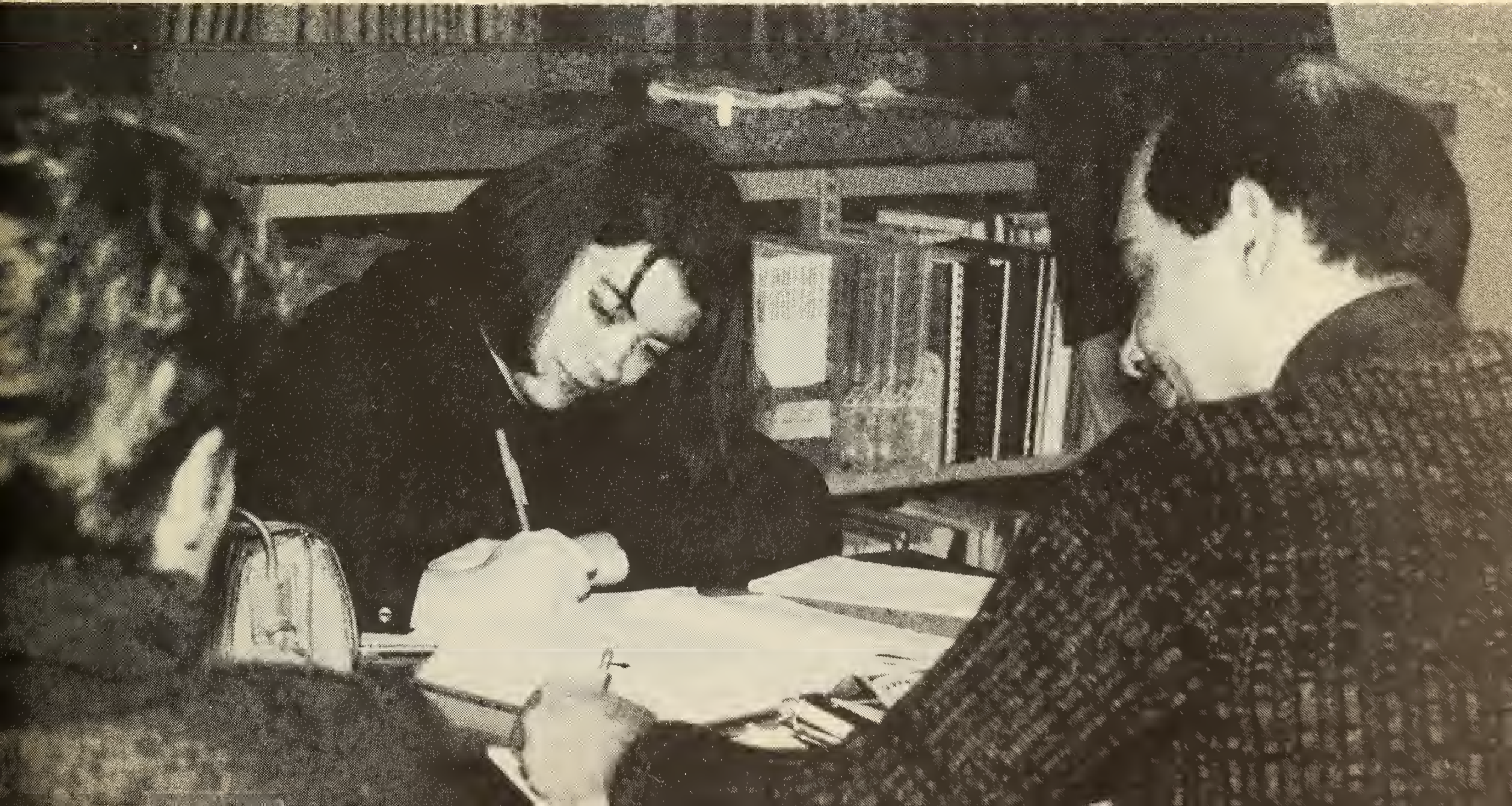
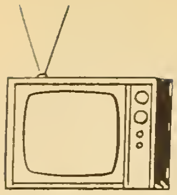
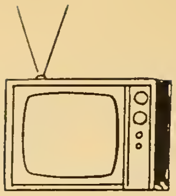
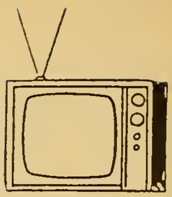


Photo by Humberto Solar

Ontario, it appears as if the gender gap has closed in this respect.

Interestingly, if one excludes the general interest courses, the general payment pattern remains very similar. There is a very slight rise in the proportion of courses paid for by the employer when the general interest courses are excluded. This might indicate that where employers are paying for adult education courses, it often tends to be as a benefit of employment, rather than as an integral part of employment training.

Adult Courses in Reading and Writing Skills

Given the recent concern over reading and writing skills in Canadian society (Calamai, 1987), it is interesting to look at the respondents' perceptions of benefit to themselves in taking a course to improve reading and writing. As Table 31 indicates, just under half of all respondents indicated that they felt that they could benefit from a course to improve their reading and writing.

The most interesting findings related to this question are found in the relationship between occupational class and perceived benefit. The four occupational categories where more than half of the respondents indicated that they might benefit are: industrial workers (65 percent); unemployed (58 percent); professional employees (58 percent); and students (58 percent). The category of non-industrial workers probably belongs in the same list with 49 percent. This list, therefore, includes blue-collar workers, professionals, and individuals not presently in the work force. At the other end of the spectrum we find: corporate executives (33 percent); homemakers (33 percent); and the retired (39 percent). Clearly, the perception that instruction in reading and writing would be useful cuts across occupational class.

Table 31: "Do you think you could benefit from a course to improve your reading and writing?"

	Yes %	No %	Don't know/ Not stated %	N
All respondents	46	50	4	1,011
Age				
18-24	56	38	6	147
25-34	49	49	2	243
35-44	45	53	2	196
45-54	48	50	3	139
55-64	44	51	6	147
65 +	30	61	9	129
Sex				
Male	53	45	2	489
Female	40	54	6	522
Occupational class				
Corporate executives	36	56	9	123
Small employers	48	52	0	35
Self-employed	47	53	0	31
Managers	42	58	0	47
Professional employees	58	42	0	76
Supervisors	43	55	3	154
Non-industrial workers	49	48	3	121
Industrial workers	65	34	1	106
Unemployed	58	37	6	21
Homemakers	33	56	12	178
Retired	39	58	2	118
Students	58	39	4	61

Table 32: "How often, if ever, have you watched TV Ontario/La chaine Francaise, during the past

	%
Never	24
Less than once a month	20
Less than once a week	11
One or two times per week	23
Three or four times per week	8
Five or more times per week	12
Not stated	3
N	1,011

Educational Television and Learning

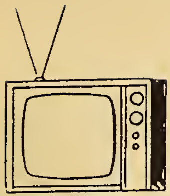
Table 32 shows that about three-quarters of the respondents indicated that they had watched one of the two TVOntario channels sometime during the past year. Forty-three percent indicated that they watched at least one or two times per week. These figures indicate that educational television is an important part of the learning resources for adults. Even excluding those respondents who watch TVOntario infrequently, we find that a large number of the adults in Ontario are using TVOntario for information on a regular basis. To explore further the use of educational television, we asked about the perceived value of educational television for learning.

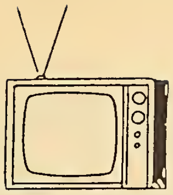
Value of Educational Television for Learning

As Table 33 indicates, a large majority of participants think that educational television is very valuable or somewhat valuable for learning. The perceived value is greatest for learning at home (86 percent) and at school (79 percent). A bare majority of 51 percent of the respondents felt that television would be very valuable or somewhat valuable for learning in the workplace.

Courses on Educational Television

While a large majority see value in educational television for learning at home, and a substantial minority (43 percent) report watching TVOntario channels weekly, few respondents report following a course on educational television (see Table 34). Only eight percent of respondents indicated that they had followed a course on educational television. However, 42 percent indicated that they would consider following such a course.





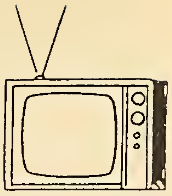


Table 33: Value of Educational Television and Computers for Learning

	Very valuable %	Somewhat valuable %	Of little or no value %	Don't know/ Not stated %	N
"How valuable do you think educational television is for learning?"					
At home	42	44	11	3	1,011
At school	30	49	16	6	1,011
At work	16	35	38	11	1,011
"How valuable do you think the use of computers is for learning:"					
At home	49	39	7	5	1,011
At school	68	27	2	3	1,011
At work	64	28	4	4	1,011

Returning to Table 29, we can compare the willingness to follow a course by television to the actual participation in adult education courses in the past year. (The comparison here is with responses to the adult education question. Too few respondents reported following a course on educational TV to allow analysis of background differences.) By examining age, we see the general pattern of direct correlation between age and the willingness to follow a course on educational television. However, those indicating that they would consider following a television course are more widely distributed than the pattern of actual participation in an adult education course. There are many more older adults who are interested in following a course on television than there are who report actually taking an adult education course in the past year.

The same phenomenon is found with respect to prior education. Among individuals with less prior education, the proportion who are interested in following a course on educational television is greater than it is for those who have taken a course. If one considers the actual participation of respondents in adult education courses, the ratio for the lowest and highest educational categories is approximately 1:7, while the ratio for the lowest and highest categories with respect to willingness to follow a course on educational television is approximately 1:3.

Table 34: "Have you ever followed (would you consider following) a course carried on educational television?"

	Yes %	N
Have followed a course	8	1,011
Would consider following a course	42	1,011

Finally, we see the same pattern in relation to family income. For actual participation in courses, the ratio is about 1:5, while the ratio for willingness to follow a television course is approximately 1:3. It seems clear that providing alternatives to traditional face-to-face courses might ameliorate the class bias in current adult education.

Value of Computers for Learning

Another interesting comparison with the perceived educational value of educational television emerges in respondents' assessment of the usefulness of computers. Table 33 indicates that the overwhelming majority of respondents felt that computers were valuable for learning. Ninety-five percent of the respondents felt that computers would be useful at school for learning, ninety-two percent felt that they would be useful in the workplace, and a total of eighty-eight percent felt they would be useful for learning in the home. Thus, more respondents felt that computers would be valuable for learning in the workplace than those who felt that educational television would be. Nevertheless, both educational technologies are highly valued for learning. ☐

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Notes and References

Notes:

1. See Livingstone (1979), Livingstone and Hart (1980, 1981), Livingstone, Hart, and McLean (1983), and Livingstone, Hart, and Davie (1985, 1987).
2. See Flower (1984) and Reid (1986) for notable occasional national education polls
3. See Wheeler (1976), Marsh (1982), and Robinson and Meadow (1982).

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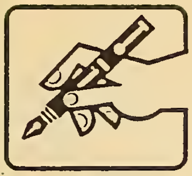

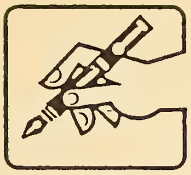

Summary

Public satisfaction with the overall situation in Ontario schools has continued to decline. Increasingly, dissatisfaction is linked to perceptions of declining quality in the high school system. This does not mean, however, that an increasing proportion of Ontarians see a decline in quality. Perceptions of changes in the quality of high school education have, in fact, remained nearly the same over the past decade. However, in contrast to the beginning of the decade, a majority of those who see a decline in quality are now dissatisfied with the schools; previously, only among those who thought the quality of high school education had "greatly deteriorated" did a majority report being dissatisfied with the school system in general.

It should be noted that despite the increase in dissatisfaction with the schools since 1982, the dissatisfied continue to constitute a minority — currently about one-third. Similarly, only about a third think that the quality of high school education has declined. Views on changes in the competence of elementary and high school teachers follow essentially the same pattern.

Support for increased funding of the public education system from the elementary through to the university level has continued to grow in recent years, with the majority of Ontarians now favouring increased funding at all levels. Support for increased funding of adult training programs continues to be even higher. People remain divided, however, in their personal willingness to pay increased taxes to fund increased educational spending. A small majority now favour paying for public education through increasing the share of provincial taxes and reducing property taxes. A definite majority of Ontarians continue to support the full funding of Catholic schools, but there is less support for extending funding to private schools. There also seems to be plurality support for the general idea of transferring buildings of public schools with declining enrolment to the Catholic system with growing enrolment.

In terms of the possible extension of educational services, a bare majority favour continuing to provide childhood education from age five rather than starting earlier. A definite majority oppose the integration of heritage languages instruction into the regular school day. A strong majority express the belief that a postsecondary education is what is needed to get along in this society. Similar proportions oppose the imposition of entry quotas on postsecondary programs, and support the alternative use of vacant school space for adult education programs.

After "the basics" (reading, writing, and math skills), Ontarians appear to give priority to curriculum objectives emphasizing the personal development of students rather than knowledge of academic subjects. However, technical knowledge of how to use computers also receives strong support and is linked to priorities for academic subjects. The elementary schools receive high performance ratings in terms of how well students are learning "the basics" as well as the use of computers. The high schools receive high ratings for math skills and use of computers, but not for literacy skills. On the personal development objectives ranked highly for elementary school, performance ratings for both levels of the school system are lower.

Ontarians currently hold quite mixed views about homogeneous versus heterogeneous ability grouping for classroom instruction. They are more deeply divided over the issue of advanced, general, and basic streams versus common programs of study in high school. But the vast majority think there is a need for differential preparation before the end of high school, with a bare majority wanting such selection to begin before Grade 11. A substantial majority of Ontarians favour using province-wide testing to assess the individual performance of students. However, only a small minority think this is the best way to assess students. Most of those who support province-wide tests, in fact, indicate that these should not be most important in evaluating students.

Students from low-income backgrounds are identified by most respondents as at higher risk of dropping out of high school before graduation than others. Only a minority, however, are aware that students from selected ethnic and immigrant groups also have above average drop-out rates. Opinion is divided over whether a common program of study at the high school level would encourage or discourage students from low-income backgrounds. However, those who think abolishing streaming would encourage these students are much more likely than others to support instituting a common program of study. Only a minority think students are at least "somewhat well" prepared to make the decision as to whether to drop out of high school or stay until graduation. For most, an effective strategy to reduce the number of dropouts involves taking account of students "out of school" interests and experience rather than making the school environment more supportive. More relevant courses and more programs including on-the-job training are favoured over improving student/teacher relations, or providing more counselling or more tutoring.

Most respondents do not appear to hold the school system responsible for inequalities in educational outcomes related to students' social class background. Similarly, most think girls now receive as much encouragement as boys to pursue math and science programs and courses. However, a majority recognizes that female postsecondary graduates obtain lower salaried jobs, on average, than men with the same educational credentials.

Participation in adult and continuing education remains an important phenomenon in Ontario. Approximately one in four adults reported taking a course in the past year, and participation remains strongly associated with age, prior education, family income, and occupational class. A large proportion of the respondents reported watching educational television, and believe that educational television is beneficial to learning, although only a small percentage reported following a course on television. The proportion of respondents reporting that they might be willing to follow an educational course was substantially higher than the actual participation rates. Most individuals paid for their own adult education course. There was no difference in the proportion of courses paid for by employers for males and females; the gender gap seems to have closed. In the youngest age category, just under half of the respondents indicated that they thought they would benefit from a course in reading and writing, including similar proportions of both white-collar and blue-collar workers.

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Appendix

The Main Sample of the Adult Population of Ontario

1. Sampling Procedures and Representativeness — The methodology of the 1988 survey was essentially the same as that used in the OISE surveys since 1979. The questionnaire was administered to a sample of 1,011 adults (persons 18 years and over) in the Canadian Gallup Ontario Omnibus survey for September 1988. The sample was designed to be representative of adult Ontario residents, excluding those residing in institutions and in the far north. Gallup employed a modified probability sample in population centres of over 1,000 persons and a quota sample in rural areas. Sampling was conducted in stages. Initially, 105 census enumeration areas were selected from a listing of enumeration areas in geographical order by community size. Within the selected urban enumeration areas, a random block sampling procedure was used, the interviewers following a specified route from a fixed starting point. Within households, the following quota-based procedure was used. Initially, the youngest adult male at home at the time was interviewed. If no male was available or the male quota was filled, then the youngest available adult female was interviewed. In the case of rural enumeration areas, quota sampling based on age and sex was employed.

The 1988 sample was weighted to remedy slight imbalances in age and sex groups as follows:

	Male	Female
18 to 29 years	1,156	1.144
30 to 49 years	0.874	0.915
50 years and over	0.942	1.108

The weighted sample appears to somewhat under-represent those with less than high school completion, and to over-represent those with postsecondary education.

2. Explanation of the Categories of Background Variables — Some clarification of the categories employed for occupational class and region may be helpful. With the exception of the sample of corporate executives (outlined in a following section), the categorization of occupational class for those in the labour force is based initially upon an aggregation of "unit groups" of occupations as listed in the Occupational Classification Manual Statistics Canada (1980). One key modification made is the separate categorization of those owning their own business or self-employed under the headings "small employers" or "self-employed." Small employers are defined as those owning their own business and having less than 50 paid employees. The self-employed category is restricted essentially to those working for themselves alone or in partnership.

It should be noted that specific occupational titles of the small employer and self-employed categories overlap on occasion with each other or with salaried and wage-earning categories since the critical distinction here is the employment of paid labour, not type of work. In the case of the other categories, the main consideration has been degree of personal autonomy or control over one's own work and extent of supervisory and/or technical control over the work of others. The division of managers and supervisors separates the upper and middle management from "front-line" supervisors. The managers category also includes those whose work involves some immediate supervision of others, but as well contributes to the organization of tasks beyond their own unit through providing technical information or advice regarding the overall administration of their organization. Non-managerial, salaried, professional employees are distinguished from wageworkers primarily in terms of the degree of autonomy accorded in their work. "Industrial workers" are distinguished from other wageworkers by their location in primary resource extracting, manufacturing, construction, or transportation sectors of the workforce. The category of "student" includes those identifying themselves as students, even if employed.

The unemployed include respondents who identify themselves as unemployed or who state that their main source of income is unemployment insurance. It should be noted that respondents who do not identify themselves as unemployed but are without work, and who are currently dependent on private sources of income (for example, savings) are not included. Our criteria thus likely underestimate the level of unemployment among Ontario residents.

The division of the province into geographical regions is as follows: Metro Toronto includes all of Metropolitan Toronto; Metro outskirts take in the area inside a line drawn between Hamilton, Cambridge, Barrie, and Oshawa; Eastern and Western Ontario are divided by a line running north from Barrie; and Northern Ontario includes North Bay and areas further north.

The Supplementary Sample of Corporate Executives

A special survey of corporate executives has been conducted in each year of the survey in view of the fact that individuals in this small but distinct occupational class would be unlikely to appear in sufficient numbers within the main population sample. Our concern to secure adequate representation of this occupational class arose out of an appreciation of the impact of their private decisions as well as the influence of their representatives in shaping the context of and demands upon the educational system in Ontario. Our previous surveys have indicated relatively distinct orientations by members of this occupational class on issues such as the priority for job training at the high school level, the role of universities in meeting labour force needs, and the allocation of financial resources to education.

The sample survey of corporate executives has been drawn from corporate directors resident in Ontario and engaged in managing corporations based in the province. A list was compiled from the Financial Post *Directory of Directors* (1988). From this, a sample of 465 was drawn by simple random selection, using computer-generated random numbers.

The special survey was conducted

using a mailed questionnaire, this being the only financially practical method in this case. We have received to date 123 valid responses and 41 returns to sender due to out of date addresses and changes in employment. Subtracting the latter from the original sample size, our response rate is currently approximately 30 percent. (See Livingstone & Hart, 1981, Appendix 1, for a discussion of issues of comparability between mail survey and personal interview methods.)

Table A: Recommended Allowance for Sampling Error of a Percentage

In Percentage Points (At 95 in 100 Confidence Level)

Sample Size	1000	600	400	200	100
Percentages near 10	2	4	4	5	7
Percentages near 20	3	4	5	7	9
Percentages near 30	4	5	6	8	10
Percentages near 40	4	5	6	9	11
Percentages near 50	4	5	6	9	11
Percentages near 60	4	5	6	9	11
Percentages near 70	4	5	6	8	10
Percentages near 80	3	4	5	7	9
Percentages near 90	2	4	4	5	7

Sampling Tolerances

In this study, the opinions and preferences of 1,011 respondents are taken to represent those of all adults resident in Ontario. In the case of findings for subgroups, the numbers are even smaller — 522 women represent all women in the province and 221 respondents with university training stand in for all those over 18 years of age with this level of schooling. (These are in fact the weighted totals.) For any sample survey, it can be expected that there will be differences between the findings for these relatively small numbers of representatives and the results which would have been obtained if the entire population had been surveyed. It is possible, however, with knowledge of the size of the sample (or the size of subgroups within it), and of how the sample was drawn, to estimate how large the error might be between sample findings and what results would have been obtained for the whole population. Furthermore, the chances of the estimate itself being too low can also be calculated.

We have provided below three tables giving estimates of possible errors due to sampling. These estimates are based, for ease of calculation, on a formula strictly appropriate only to a simple random sample. For such a sample, estimates should be accurate 95 times out of 100. This means the actual difference between the figures cited for the sample and what a survey of the entire population (or sub-population) would have arrived at should be equal to or less than the estimate 95 percent of the time. However, the survey is based upon a modified probability sample which entailed stratified, cluster sampling. The stated estimates may thus exaggerate or minimize sampling error at the stated 95 percent confidence level in particular instances.

Table A provides estimates of error for any percentage taken by itself. The estimate indicates that the actual percentage for the population might be the stated number of percentage points either greater or less than the percentage actually obtained in our study. It will be noted that the estimate of margin of error increases as the number of respondents or portion of the sample on which it is based declines, and as the percentage being considered approached 50 percent. The reader will need to use both pieces of information in deciding on the correct estimate of error. For example, in Table 5, which presents findings on public funding preferences for all levels of the educational system, 61 percent of all respondents favoured increased spending. The estimate of possible sampling error for this statistic is found in Table A at the intersection of the row for "percentages near 60" and the column for sample size of 1,000 (since the percentage is based on the entire sample of 1,011).

The estimate of sampling error is 4 percent; that is, if the survey had covered the entire population of Ontario, chances are 95 in 100 that the percentage favouring increased spending would have fallen between 57 percent and 65 percent. The particular importance of the numbers of respondents on which a percentage is based can be illustrated by checking the error estimate for the percentage of those 45 to 54 years of age who want increased educational funding. The percentage stated in Table 5 is 55 percent for a subsample size of 139; the error margin is found in Table A at the

Table B: Recommended Allowance for Sampling Error of a Difference between Percentages, Where Percentages Are Near 20 or 80 Percent

In Percentage Points (At 95 in 100 Confidence Level)

Sample Size	600	400	200	100	50
600	7				
400	7	7			
200	8	8	10		
100	10	10	11	13	
50	13	13	14	15	18

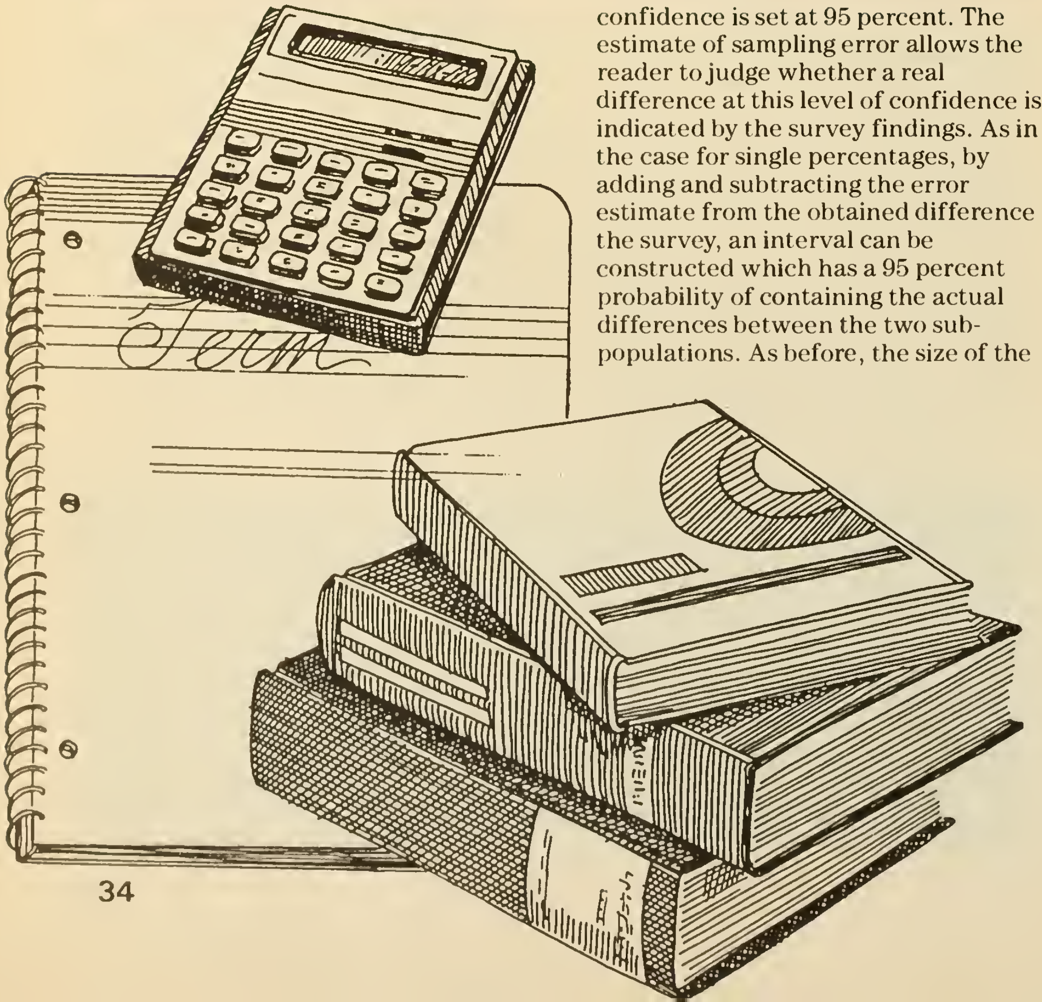
intersection of the row for "percentages near 50 (or 60) percent" and the column for a sample size of 100. The estimate is 11 percent, meaning there is a 95 percent probability that the true percentage for this age group lies between 44 percent and 66 percent.

Usually the interest is not in a single group but in a comparison between groups, as, for example, age cohorts. Tables B and C provide estimates of sampling error for the difference between two percentages rather than for the size of any one percentage. The question here is, How large must a difference between the percentages of two groups be before we can have confidence that the difference is real and not the product of sampling error? Again, as for Table A, the level of confidence is set at 95 percent. The estimate of sampling error allows the reader to judge whether a real difference at this level of confidence is indicated by the survey findings. As in the case for single percentages, by adding and subtracting the error estimate from the obtained difference in the survey, an interval can be constructed which has a 95 percent probability of containing the actual differences between the two sub-populations. As before, the size of the sampling error increases as the percentages involved (not the differences between them) approach 50 percent, and particularly as the number of respondents on which they are based decreases. Where in Table A percentage sizes defined rows of estimates on the table, here the problem is handled by providing two tables: Table B for use where the percentages are close to 20 or 80 percent; Table C where they approach 50 percent.

Table C: Recommended Allowance for Sampling Error of a Difference between Percentages, Where Percentages Are Near 50 Percent

In Percentage Points (At 95 in 100 Confidence Level)

Sample Size	600	400	200	100	50
600	7				
400	8	8			
200	10	10	12		
100	12	12	14	16	
50	16	16	17	19	22



The rows and columns in each table are defined by the number of respondents on which the percentages are based. We can illustrate the use of these tables by returning to the interpretation of Table 5 concerning educational spending preferences. There is, on the face of it, a large (20 percent) difference in the percentage of 45 to 54 year olds (55 percent) versus the percentage of those 65 or over (35 percent), who want increased spending. These percentages are, taken together, closer to 50 percent than 20 percent, making Table C the better choice. From the table of sample composition we find there are 139 respondents 45 to 54 years of age in the sample, and 129 over 65. The most appropriate estimate from Table C is at the intersection of the "100" row with the "100" column. The estimate is 16 percent. Since the obtained difference is 20 percent, we can be 95 percent confident that a real difference of opinion exists between these age cohorts in the population. We can go further to state, with the same level of confidence, that had we surveyed all persons in these age cohorts, the difference in percentages seeing improvement in high schools in general would have been between 4 and 36 percent.

While the use of the tables is set out here in a mechanical way, it will become clear in practice that the reader will have to use some judgment in deciding cases where percentages or sample sizes are intermediate between those provided in tables of error estimates. The reader should recognize that this choice is basically between lesser or greater estimates of error and, hence, between more or less conservative interpretations of the survey findings. ■

Enquête en éducation ontarienne

Bernard Courte

L'enquête 1988 de l'Institut d'études pédagogiques de l'Ontario (IEPO) sur les questions pédagogiques, menée par les professeurs David Livingstone et Lynn Davie et l'adjoint de recherche Doug Hart, montre qu'une majorité d'Ontariennes et Ontariens veut que le gouvernement accorde un plus grand financement dans le domaine de l'éducation. Voici quelques-unes des conclusions de la 8e étude du genre à avoir été produite par l'IEPO.

Financement et services

L'appui pour des subventions accrues à tous les niveaux du système d'éducation publique continue à grandir. En 1980, une personne sur trois appuyait l'augmentation du financement au-delà du niveau de l'inflation et en 1988, près de 60 pour cent des gens sont d'accord avec ce principe. Cette tendance s'applique autant au financement des écoles élémentaires et secondaires qu'aux institutions postsecondaires.

Environ un-tiers des répondants voudrait que le gouvernement limite ses subventions aux écoles publiques ou à celles-ci plus les écoles catholiques jusqu'à la 10e année; environ un-tiers appuie la subvention entière des écoles catholiques et la majorité du tiers qui reste appuie les subventions à toutes les écoles, qu'elles soient publiques, catholiques ou privées.

C'est sur cette question qu'on trouve la divergence la plus significative entre les francophones et les anglophones. Ainsi, peu de catholiques francophones déclarent appuyer autre chose que la subvention des écoles catholiques. En effet, 81 pour cent des francophones souhaitent voir les subventions aller aux écoles publiques et catholiques (38) ou à celles-ci plus celles des autres religions (17) ou à ces groupes ainsi que les écoles privées (26). La même tendance est retrouvée au niveau du transfert des écoles publiques au secteur catholique : 60 pour cent des francophones appuient ces tranferts et 7 pour cent s'y opposent (chez les anglophones, la proportion est de 44 pour cent en faveur et de 27 pour cent qui s'y opposent).

Plus de deux-tiers des personnes interrogées veulent voir une augmentation des dépenses au niveau du recyclage et de l'alphabétisation des adultes (le sondage effectué en 1986 donnait des résultats semblables).

Deux-tiers des répondants rejettent la réduction de l'accès aux programmes universitaires et collégiaux en fonction des possibilités d'emploi pour les diplômés. Cette résistance au contingentement des effectifs augmente depuis 1982.

Qualité et satisfaction

La perception d'un enseignement de qualité au niveau secondaire a demeuré assez stable dans la dernière décennie. En 1988, environ le quart des répondants voyait des améliorations sur les dix dernières années, une personne sur cinq voyait peu de changement, tandis que deux sur cinq pensaient qu'il y avait eu détérioration.

Les répondants se sont déclarés moins satisfaits du système scolaire en général. Jusqu'en 1982, environ la moitié se montrait satisfaite; en 1988, ce nombre s'élève à peine à une personne sur trois. L'insatisfaction est de plus en plus reliée aux perceptions de baisse au niveau de la qualité.

Une majorité des répondants se dit d'accord avec l'utilisation d'examens provinciaux pour évaluer la performance des élèves du secondaire; il n'y a cependant qu'une petite minorité de gens qui semble croire qu'on améliorera l'évaluation étudiante en accordant une importance promordiale à ces tests.

Les stratégies les plus fréquemment choisies pour réduire le nombre de décrocheurs étaient de mieux relier les sujets d'études aux intérêts et expériences des élèves ainsi que d'offrir plus de programmes qui combinent le travail scolaire et en milieu d'emploi.

La formation continue

Près du quart de l'échantillon déclare s'être inscrit à des cours offerts à l'éducation des adultes durant l'année (en 1986, c'était une personne sur cinq).

Près de la moitié voit une utilité à s'inscrire à des cours pour améliorer sa capacité de lecture et d'écriture.

Quatre répondants sur cinq considèrent que la télévision éducative est importante pour l'apprentissage à la maison et à l'école, tandis que la moitié croit qu'elle est précieuse pour l'apprentissage en milieu de travail. Près de trois-quart des gens interrogés déclarent avoir regardé la chaîne anglaise ou française de TVOntario durant les douze mois précédant l'enquête; deux sur cinq disent la regarder au moins une fois par semaine.

A propos du sondage

Ce sondage est composé d'un échantillon représentatif de 1,011 adultes de 18 ans et plus, interviewés à leur domicile partout en Ontario entre les 12 et 24 septembre par la firme de sondage canadienne Gallup. Durant la même période, un échantillon spécial additionnel composé de dirigeants d'entreprises a répondu à un questionnaire par courrier. Les résultats du sondage principal ont une marge d'erreur de 4 pour cent dans 95 pour cent des cas.

Le rapport du sondage est organisé en fonction des thèmes principaux abordés dans le questionnaire : évaluation générale des écoles; préférences de financement; prolongation des services pédagogiques; priorités de programmes; organisation au niveau secondaire (incluant des sections sur le groupement par aptitudes, l'évaluation étudiante et le décrochage); les inégalités scolaires et la formation continue des adultes.

Lorsque c'est possible, les conclusions du sondage font référence à des points comparables venant d'autres enquêtes autant que des sondages IEPO antérieurs. Les réponses aux questions ont été analysées en fonction de plusieurs variables, dont : l'âge, le sexe, le contact avec les écoles, le niveau de scolarité, la religion, la langue maternelle, l'origine ethique, le revenu familial, la catégorie d'emploi, la région et la communauté (dimension urbaine ou rurale). ☐

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Notes from the DIRECTOR

The 1988 OISE Survey

The recently released OISE Survey of Public Attitudes to Education in Ontario has served this province and its educational community well. It is one thing to take a reading of the perceptions of a jurisdiction's citizens. Often their views will be influenced by events of the day, and a reliance on such data can produce self-defeating strategies.

It is quite another thing for a province to have the benefit of surveys over a period of a decade and be able to witness significant shifts in public attitudes. Only a place such as OISE with its continuing commitment to education and pragmatic policy orientation would have kept this process as a priority and would have faculty and research officers prepared to participate, as Messrs. Livingstone, Hart, and Davie have done in this past year.

Political action does not slavishly follow revelations of public changes of attitude, but it cannot ignore them either, at least not in a democracy. The parliamentary system with its active opposition parties and daily question period is one form of reaction that keeps such information in sight, as does the constant work of press and periodical. But government members, including cabinet ministers, must address policy formation and to not be influenced by such evidence as the OISE Survey would be electoral madness. That a citizenry has stated in a consistent and continuing fashion that it is both unhappy with the educational system and prepared to see more provincial resources devoted to its well-being is a fact no intelligent politician can ignore.

Surely, this is a worthy contribution for an institute seeking to work in the broadest form of public policy formation.

Walter Pitman

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